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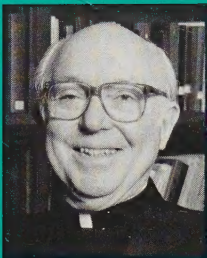
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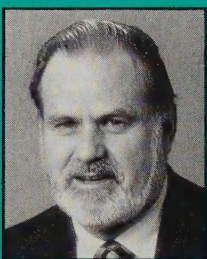
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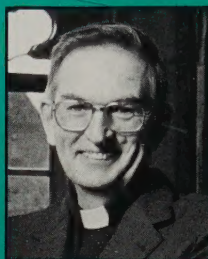
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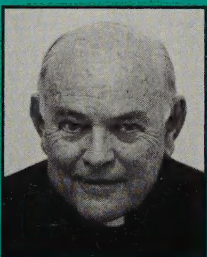
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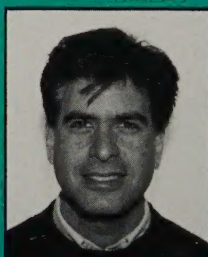
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Authors are responsible for the completeness and accuracy of proper names in both text and bibliography. Acknowledgments must be given when substantial material is quoted from other publications. Provide author name(s), title of article, title of journal or book, volume number, page(s), month and year, and publisher's permission to use material.

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EDITOR'S PAGE

EARLY THOUGHTS ABOUT THANKSGIVING DAY

August is just beginning as I write this page, and today's heat and humidity are precisely what you would expect from a typical East Coast summer. I watched several perspiring people buying electric fans this morning while I waited in line to pay for a belated birthday card. Standing there, I mentally relived an array of peak moments in a cherished and long-lasting friendship. My deep feelings of gratitude to God for placing good friends in my life minimized my impatience over the line's snail-paced approach to the checkout counter.

It was on my way out of the store, as I glanced again at its enormous display of greeting cards, that I noticed hundreds of them arranged in a section marked "Thanksgiving Day." I thought, "There's something wrong about this. Thanksgiving Day doesn't occur until late in November, and it's only early August. Somebody must have made a mistake, putting them on sale prematurely."

Starting the engine of my car a few minutes later, I was still thinking about Thanksgiving cards, and a pair of questions came to mind: To whom do people send cards on this national holiday? Isn't it a day set aside to say thanks to God for the blessings that make life wonderful here in America?

I smiled, imagining millions of Americans mailing Thanksgiving Day cards to God. But if not to God, to whom do they actually send them? My curiosity led me to turn off the car engine, walk back into the store, and search for answers. It took reading about thirty or so cards to discover the truth: most of these Thanksgiving greetings do not in the slightest way refer to God. Many say "Have a wonderful holiday."

Others tell friends "I'm thinking of you at Thanksgiving," "Hope yours is a joyous feast," or just "Wish you a happy Thanksgiving." More personally, some cards express a nonspecific form of gratitude through sentences like "Thanks to you for all that you and I share" or "You, dear, have given me so much to be thankful for." Less romantically, many say merely "Hope today's a great day for you" or advise "Don't eat too much turkey." Do messages like these give any hint that what our Pilgrim ancestors initiated in 1621, and what Americans continue to celebrate annually, is a day officially set aside to publicly express our whole nation's thanks to Almighty God?

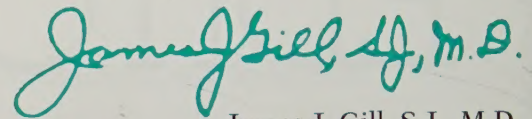
Obviously, it's a good thing that people take time to send cards telling one another they are wished happiness, are remembered on a special day, and are valued sharers of life. But I think that those of us who desire to keep the true spirit of Thanksgiving Day alive would do well to choose carefully the cards we buy and send. I saw one this morning that quoted Psalm 95: "Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving." Another said, "May our thanksgiving be to God, for we have been deeply and richly blessed." Such expressions come close to the wording of the First Thanksgiving Proclamation (June 20, 1696), in which the governing council of Charlestown, Massachusetts, declared that it unanimously "thought meet to appoint and set apart . . . a day of solemn thanksgiving and praise to God for His goodness and favor, many particulars of which mercy might be instanced."

In that proclamation, the council members cited a number of the "particulars" they considered to be signs of God's "goodness and favor." They recalled that with "Fatherly compassion and regard," God had preserved "many of our towns from desolation threatened and attempted by the enemy" and given "many of our confederates many signal advantages"

against their enemies. The council spoke of their fear that God would view their community as an "insensible people" if they were not collectively "standing before Him with thanksgiving."

I realize that by composing, in August, this page about a November Thanksgiving Day, I'm probably focusing foolishly far ahead. But perhaps it is never too early to think specifically about the blessings God showers upon us through the country God has given to us as our home, and through the people God places in our lives as evidence of God's love. With such

thoughts deepening our sense of gratitude, we can in due time speak personally to each other or send cards that convey a true appreciation of the connections between God, our nation, the blessings we recognize, and the turkey dinners we share with those we love.



James J. Gill, S.J., M.D.
Editor-in-Chief

Guest Editorial: Avoiding the Little Life

Recently, some friends urged my wife, Anita, and me to view the 1989 movie *Shirley Valentine*. An outstanding British comedy adapted from the script of the one-woman play by the same title, the film causes viewers to think about the meaning of life.

Shirley Valentine (played by Pauline Collins) is a 42-year-old wife and mother who is bored with her life. The spark has gone out of her marriage to Joe, a hard-working guy who over the years has become insensitive and demanding, especially about the food that Shirley prepares. He wants steak every Thursday night and fish and chips every Tuesday night. When Shirley serves Joe fish and chips one Thursday night, he is livid. That's when Shirley decides to accept an invitation to accompany her girlfriend on an all-expenses-paid vacation in Greece that the friend has won.

In Greece, Shirley finds herself asking whatever happened to the Shirley Valentine she once was—a spirited youth filled with dreams about her future. Abandoned by her friend, who has chosen to share her time in Greece with a man she met on the airplane, Shirley has a fling with a bar owner who works his charms on lonely middle-aged women like herself.

In literature—including the Bible, with its stories of adultery, incest, murder, rape, theft, and treachery—we meet men and women at war with themselves. Some, who in moments of weakness violate their commitments, in time use those experiences to become better people.

To convey this kind of inner conflict as his characters develop for good or ill, Shakespeare often uses the soliloquy. Out of earshot of everyone except the audience, the protagonist goes off to the side of the stage and reveals what he or she is really thinking. That also happens in *Shirley Valentine*. Consider what Shirley says as she sits alone at a table, drinking wine and watching the sun set over the sea. Shirley's unanswered questions invite us to ask ourselves the same things: "I have led such a little life, and even that will be over pretty soon. I have allowed myself to lead that little life when inside me there is so much more. And it's all gone unused. Why do we get all this life if we don't use it? And

why do we get all these feelings and dreams and hopes if we don't have to use them?"

Examples abound in church history of real-life people who did not permit themselves to lead little lives: Francis of Assisi, Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Siena, Mother Teresa, and John XXIII are a few who come to mind. And what about the examples we have from history: Gandhi, Eleanor Roosevelt, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, and many others who did something to make their hopes and dreams become reality?

A couple of years ago, I read David Halberstam's *The Children* and marveled at the courage of the young African American men and women who integrated lunch counters in the South during the 1960s. What was done to them by white racists was shocking and despicable. Their nonviolent response to those rednecks was heroic. Fifty years ago, when I was in the seminary, every noon we read from the Roman martyrology the accounts of men and women who in the first centuries of the church suffered for their faith—suffered because they would not lead little lives. If that practice is still current, perhaps some of the readings should be accounts of the young African Americans and other modern heroes who sacrificed so much to realize their hopes and dreams.

Recently, I heard Sister Jeannine Grammick reflect on what has happened to her since the Vatican forbade her and Father Robert Nugent to minister to gay and lesbian Catholics. As I listened to her speak reverently and respectfully of authorities in the Vatican, I felt sad that the church was asking them to abandon those who have been forced to go into a closet, unable to develop their talents, share their feelings, articulate their dreams, or voice their hopes for fear of ridicule and rejection.

Jesus called twelve simple fishermen to greatness. And he is calling us to be the salt of the earth, a city seated on a mountain, the light of the world. He is not calling us to the little life.

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Individualism in Community Life

David L. Fleming, S.J.

Sister Mary Johnson, who teaches at Emmanuel College in Boston, recently wrote an article with the provocative title "Bowling Alone, Living Alone: Current Social Contexts for Living the Vows" (*Review for Religious*, March/April 2000). She was stimulated in her reflections by the article "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital" by Harvard professor Robert D. Putnam (*Journal of Democracy*, January 1995), in which bowling becomes a symbol of the disintegration of communal bonds in American society. More Americans are bowling than ever before (10 percent more in a five-year period), yet at the same time, organized leagues have plummeted (a 40 percent decrease in the same five-year period). The bowling example represents a vanishing form of what sociologists call social capital, defined by Robert Putnam as "features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit." The definition points to a simple phenomenon: we are losing the glue that allows us to live and work together.

Obviously, social capital is important for any society if its members are to be able to live and work together well. Politics and the ideals of a nation are caught up in social capital or its lack. We are much aware of it in the current political campaign. Do candidates ever talk about the "big picture," or do they

speaking only of what goods we as individuals will get out of this or that proposed agenda? The justice system, both in its courts and in its prison system; our social welfare care for the poor, the elderly, and the physically challenged; our national response to immigrants and refugees—all show the presence or absence of social capital. The vitality of the church life within a nation is reflected in its ability to engender strong social capital, at least within its membership. Do we see that kind of "glue" among us as Catholics, even in regard to a consistency in attitudes toward life issues? Women and men religious are well aware that the vibrancy of religious life rests on its social capital. We are part of a much bigger picture. Church and state are both part of the dominating social milieu. So it is necessary for us to pay attention to the social context in which we try to live our religious community lives, in which we try to stir up vocations and then to provide suitable formation, and in which we care for the elderly and the impaired.

Sociologists also draw our attention to a certain apparent countertrend. There has been a large proliferation of nonprofit organizations and various kinds of support groups. At first this might seem to represent a growth in social capital. But members of nonprofit organizations generally do not commit to coming to any events or even to maintaining a consistent

participation level. One can just have one's name attached to the organization, and that is all the "belonging" that is realized. As we know from the experience of many others as well as our own, support groups present the occasion to focus on self in the presence of others. In one of the most famous forms of support group, the Alcoholics Anonymous model, people deliberately use their first names only. Thus, while the support system is fine, individualism is highly protected, and the "belonging" gift of self is not present. These examples of what seems to be countertrends tend to highlight the individualistic trends within the social context of life. They model, perhaps, a new form of individualistic behavior and avoidance of group commitment.

Another version of this countertrend may exist in many of the associate programs connected with religious life. Consider this question in your own reflection: Do associate programs, sponsored with renewed vigor by many religious groups as our membership numbers decline, represent our own form of support group requiring only a minimal commitment? The movement may be good, but have we explored whether we are being cooperative with our culture or merely coopted by it?

DEFINITIONS AND DESCRIPTIONS

Some terms that seem a necessary part of any conversation about individualism are *individualism*, *independence*, *idiosyncrasy*, and *solipsism*.

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines *individualism* as follows: "(1): a doctrine that the interests of the individual are or ought to be ethically paramount [this also describes conduct guided by such a doctrine]; (2): the conception that all values, rights, and duties originate in individuals." This seems to indicate that the individualistic person is really quite self-centered. Such a person is a sun around which other celestial bodies revolve, a sun within a solar system.

Sometimes when we mean to say that a person is individualistic, we describe him or her as independent. The dictionary defines *independence* as "the quality or state of being independent." And *independent* is defined as "not subject to control by others; self-governing" and "not affiliated with a larger controlling unit." It can also mean "not requiring or relying on others (as for care or livelihood)," not looking to others for their opinion or for guidance in conduct, and "showing a desire for freedom."

Idiosyncrasy is defined as "a peculiarity of constitution or temperament" or "individual hypersensitiveness (as to a drug or food)." We might add, in our context, hypersensitivity to community life and its demands.

Finally, *solipsism* is defined as "a theory holding that the self can know nothing but its own modifications and that the self is the only existent thing." The dictionary does not go on to say that the person who lives in accordance with such a theory constructs his or her own self-centered world. Such a person is a sun with no recognized solar system.

All these terms apply to individuals but highlight different sets of qualities. This illustrates that individualism is a complex phenomenon and needs to be worked with carefully. The same person may show traits of independence at some times and at other times display traits of idiosyncrasy.

The following examples involving these terms concern men because their personal experiences are ones that I think I can fairly reflect on from my own leadership history.

FOUR INDIVIDUALS

Al, in his late fifties, continues to serve as pastor of a little country parish. He has not joined in on any province events for the past fifteen years. One time, when attendance at a province assembly was mandatory, he did not show up, saying that he was sick. Similarly, at the time of a required province retreat, he was suddenly unable to travel, citing a twisted knee. In fact, he seems to have no contact with anyone in the congregation. He says mass and does the necessary sacramental ministry for his small flock of aging parishioners. He steals away as often as he can to fish in a nearby lake—by himself. How would you describe Al?

Bill, in his late forties, has always been a man on a mission: he keeps moving from one mission to another. His name would be on the new assignment list every year. Of course, he tends to search out his own jobs. The jobs always have merit, and Bill easily talks superiors into his latest venture, sometimes only after he has already indicated his commitment. Some say that Bill is a real apostle; others say that Bill is always off "doing his thing." Bill is always seen at the required province events and talks easily with a wide variety of people. But he never sits down; he is always on the move. A lot of congregation members say that they have talked with Bill, but no one claims to "know" him. How would you describe Bill?

Charlie is in the theology years of his formation. He is 35 years old and has been in the congregation for eight years, after having worked for a couple of years as a social worker. He seems to surround himself with all the latest electronic equipment. Of course, he has his own computer and printer, with network access. He always has his cellular phone with him. He has his television and videocassette player with quite

a collection of films, along with a marvelous sound system and a storehouse of compact discs and tapes. Charlie keeps up in his classes; he is an average student. But he throws himself into his pastoral ministry preparation work with young people. He's right where they are, really on their wavelength. Seminary officials are a little bit concerned that Charlie never works with other seminarians. He never seems to engage in any common projects. How would you describe Charlie?

Dan has retired to the "big" community of the province at the age of 75. He has a heart condition and is troubled by arthritis in his hands and knees. Dan was a rock-solid member of the province for some fifty years, but now he has withdrawn. He keeps to his room, sometimes not even answering a knock on the door. He tends to eat at the earliest possible meal time, avoiding others as much as possible. Two of his best friends in the congregation have died over the past three years. Now no one seems able to reach out to him. How would you describe Dan?

INDIVIDUALISM: POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE

Individualism can be talked about in a positive light. We might describe an "individualistic" person as having initiative, using imagination, possessing a sense of personal freedom, and taking responsibility. A person with a certain degree of individualism could be described as a true adult, having or approaching a certain level of maturity.

But more often, a person with whom we associate individualism is thought of as self-centered, with a rugged independence and a "me-first" attitude. With this more negative connotation, there is a suggestion of the basic sin of pride about the concept of individualism. Taking a cue from our way of making a division between sins of commission and sins of omission, I would suggest that we might need to locate individualism not so much by what we think it contains but rather by what it seems to lack. For example, I might describe a person with a certain individualism as having such failings as a lack of social sense, a lack of imagination, a lack of involvement, a lack of needing completion in others, a lack of team spirit, or a lack of a sense of a trinitarian God, a God who is communion. Spiritually considered, is not the person who is individualistic modeling (and worshiping) a God who too is alone, a solipsistic God? It is hard to be truly a Christian and to be individualistic as well. We have a trinitarian God whose very life is relationship and love. We have a kingdom or reign of God, about which we are busy, with Christ, but knowing all along that it is God's work and God's doing. We can only work *with* God and so *with* one an-

other. At its root, individualism represents a failure to ground oneself in a faith that believes that God is communion and that our life, if we are to be like God, is communion-oriented. Religiously or spiritually, this is where we find our social capital, our glue. If this kind of faith is absent or not emphasized in our congregational life, are we caught up in the same lack that characterizes our secular friends?

RELIGIOUS LIFE DIFFICULTIES

Some areas of religious life seem to raise particular difficulties in regard to individualism.

Vocation Recruitment. A number of vocation promoters have reflected that we often do not construct effectively our vocational literature for people today. We often boast about or focus solely on what we do. The person making inquiry consistently has two questions: How do we pray? How do we live community life? What we do is certainly important, but the inquirer usually already has some sense of what we do by virtue of previous contact with one of our ministries. Vocational literature that pictures only a priest baptizing, a brother teaching, or someone preaching or visiting at a bedside is not the best or most effective. The concern of most inquirers is not the sphere of service. For a person who is coming out of this individualistic culture and is seeking something more, the concern is about the spirituality that brings us together and keeps us together, and about the ways we live together and support one another in such a life. These people have already experienced the lack of social capital or "glue" in their lives. They are looking to religious life for this ingredient missing from the larger social milieu. They are individuals, but they are not satisfied with individualism.

Our congregations and communities have the responsibility to answer truthfully these questions: How do we pray? Or do we? How do we live community life? Or do we really live a life that is communal? These are not questions for just the vocation promoter to answer. The answers that our community members give to these questions reveal the level of individualism that has invaded religious life. The answers also indicate whether future vocations will come and will stay.

Understanding of the Vows. Johnson's article "Bowling Alone, Living Alone" focuses only briefly on the vow of celibacy or celibate chastity. That article and two subsequent ones in *Review for Religious* were originally presented at an October 1999 symposium on the theme "Living Celibate Chastity in a

The living of celibate chastity needs to be negotiated in a communal way, both for ongoing personal support and for evaluating regularly our life together, especially as it welcomes others

Sexually Confused Culture.” Johnson’s piece examined, and this article briefly delineates, a larger context in which all three vows could be considered.

In our present context, the emphasis has changed in explaining and living the vows. Perhaps at one time the vows were looked upon as a very personal matter between the individual and God. Vows almost supported a certain individualism. I suppose that the majority of people in religious life today, being older, have been formed in this way. Most of our community members would probably consider the vows a very individual concern. The younger members and potential members, however, expect the vows to be understood and lived in a more communal way. Any explanation of the vows of religious life needs today a careful balancing and interweaving of the personal (individual) and communal (community) aspects. The social capital, or “glue,” within the observance of our vows needs to be much more clearly presented and lived.

Our observance of the vow of poverty does not come from a theoretical presentation (the Rule) or from tradition (the way we used to do it). I suspect that current members in every one of our congregations range over a wide spectrum in terms of how they live poverty. So what do we present to new members who come from Generation X or out of a post-modern mentality that lives by the individual case or situation, not by some generalized theory already proven inadequate? What are the guidelines that we live as a group, the expectations that we as a group share about our common life? What are the para-

meters of individual choice about our congregation members’ living a vow of poverty?

Poverty needs to be seen as a way of using God’s gifts. The focus of poverty today is not on the nonuse of material things but on the use of them or the way we use them, as reflected in our ecological sensitizing. We need to acknowledge that the vow of poverty is not observed in a uniform fashion in our congregation and among the members of a community. We represent the pluralism of our time. Pluralism means engagement with our differences. Our living the vow of poverty needs regular examination in our communities, especially as we take in any new member. We need to engage with and agree about the parameters of our life as a community: how we eat, entertain, use cars, and so on. We also need to engage, as a group, with our expectations of the parameters to be observed even by the individuals within the group: the kind of vacations we take, the budget levels we observe, the meaning of a simple lifestyle. Members of a group have a responsibility to observe the norms expected of the participants. And so poverty has its communal and personal understandings and lifestyle. The vow of poverty should be part of our “glue,” our social capital, bringing us more closely together in life and in work.

In a similar way, we approach the vow of celibate chastity. Chastity needs to be thought of and presented as a way of loving. It does not represent a nonloving approach to the world and to our fellow men and women. To be a religious celibate demands that we grow in being affective people. Jesus is our model, and we are always learning how to love better the way that Jesus loves. Once again, the older members among us (most likely, the majority of us) were brought up with a chastity of distance, more defined by ritual purity. Much of the earlier explanations of celibate chastity could have been written by a pagan or a stoic. Our chastity is always basically defined as a way of loving in the way Jesus loves. Younger members and potential members expect to live lives in a community setting where there is evident affection. They expect to maintain friends of both sexes, and they look forward to a ministry that allows them to be seen as people who love and know how to receive love. The vocation inquiry question about how we live community is tied up with our understanding and living of the chastity vow.

Religious congregations differ in the evident warmth and hospitality of their communities. Individuals certainly differ in the expression of affection because of personality type, family upbringing, ethnic background, and cultural background. A certain pluralism is necessary today in the way that we live the vow of chastity. We must engage with our differ-

ences in terms of what this means for our community life—for example, our ways of showing hospitality, our ease at having both women and men guests in our common areas, our ability to work with both women and men partners in ministry. Individuals, perhaps easy in showing their affections in proper celibate ways, still need to observe the common norms to which we as a congregation commit ourselves. The living of celibate chastity needs to be negotiated in a communal way, both for ongoing personal support and for evaluating regularly our life together, especially as it welcomes others. Chastity, too, should provide the social capital that brings us together in life and in work.

We often think of the vow of obedience as the one touching on the problem of individualism. Without statistics to support me, I would venture to say that those of us in religious life who are older (again, probably the majority in our congregations) accept the vow of obedience as a part of the package of working within the religious congregation. Before Generation X, this kind of obedience was found in society at large. We all have been affected by the climate of change and permissiveness that was part of religious life's response to Vatican II renewal. But younger members and potential members seem to show more immediately their individualism when it comes to the vow of obedience. They seek a dialogue-obedience: they expect to present options, they expect to be listened to, to be reasoned with. They expect a true dialogue; they do not expect, "I command; you obey." Whereas those of us with an older understanding of obedience may have considered only our own personal action as being obedient, the newer emphasis for obedience places its meaning in "for us." Obedience always makes present the "we." When I am assigned to work in a soup kitchen, "we"—the community, the congregation—are present in the soup kitchen. The failure in obedience today is the failure to have the "we" present. No one can find his or her own job, no one can self-assign, and still be obedient. It is true that obedience, like the other vows, requires negotiation, which can be stressful and time-consuming. But obedience is recapturing, especially in our scattered numbers, the communal sense of what we as a congregation are all about. The vow of obedience, then, is one more element in the social capital that binds us in our life and work together.

Refounding. Gerald Arbuckle, a Marist anthropologist, has written a number of books on the theme of refounding. He holds that the "renewal" we talked about and worked at after Vatican II remained too much of a surface change. In terms of religious life,

Arbuckle believes that what we really need is a true refounding and insists that "the new belongs elsewhere." In a rather crass way, I would take this to mean, for instance, not scattering three of our younger priests in parishes or works in which the older members of the congregation who are already present are fixed in their ways of living and ministering. I think Arbuckle is calling for these three priests to be set up in a new community and a new work. Then these three men would find mutual support for their life together and for their way of ministering.

I worked with Arbuckle in two years of workshops a decade ago, but I was never convinced of the principle "the new belongs elsewhere." To me, it seemed divisive for a congregation to adopt that principle. I kept thinking that all of us in a province or congregation should keep coming along, and it would just take time. Bigger communities and traditional works could be the settings for anything new.

Now, however, I have changed my outlook. If I were a superior, I think that I would be more open to trying this approach today. I find that young religious are being worn down by a community of men whom they love and respect but who offer them little of the support they need. I think the imaginations of younger members are held down by the weight of tradition that encases many of our ministries and the ways we go about them. Whereas I formerly lumped "the new belongs elsewhere" with a certain kind of individualism, I now tend to see it with all the good connotations of individualism. I propose that we should give fair consideration to the principle "the new belongs elsewhere."

Call to Empower Others. We have often referred to the current part of church history as the age of the laity. One of the principal tasks that we religious have set for ourselves has been an empowering of the laity. But have we really thought through what it is that we want to happen? To have power usually means that someone else is the recipient, the one upon whom the power is being exercised. Power can be used, even in church circles, with only its secular meaning. God best shows the face of being the all-powerful as Jesus looks down from the cross. Power for God is imaged in Jesus' plaintive cry, "Will you leave me, too?" when followers left over his promise of being our food and drink. Divine power has quite a different meaning from secular power. When we seek to empower someone, I believe that we need to remember clearly that we find our roots in a spiritual life world. It is true that we are empowering to live in this very secular world, but the empowering comes from God, and we are dealing with the world of grace. If we root our

meaning of empowering in God, and if we are about what God is doing in us, then I believe that we religious do have a mission of empowering. Again, we are building up the social capital; we are providing the glue.

Incorporating the Alien. In my travels to foreign countries, I have been struck, at times, when I need to stand in a visa entry line that is identified for aliens. I keep looking around to see if anyone looks like they belong on *Star Trek*. Then I begin to wonder whether I look like I belong on *Star Trek*. *Alien* is such an off-putting word.

I want to share with you another change in my thinking since the time I was a provincial superior. I believed that I had an openness to other cultural or ethnic groups—for example, African American, Hispanic, and Asian, particularly Vietnamese. When I entered the Jesuits, there was one African American in our group of sixty seven. My sister knew his father. She was a secretary working in the Arcade Building in downtown St. Louis, Missouri, and he worked as a janitor there. They would get together to talk about us as we went through the novitiate experiences. The janitor's son was a college graduate, and I was just out of high school. We were friends, but not close friends—with family connections. I did not realize then, nor even when I was provincial, how much the traditional American “melting pot” analogy of incorporation permeated my whole understanding of how we live and work together. I had little idea of what we were asking any African American to do in joining our white United States Society of Jesus. We made little or no accommodation: you join us, and you fit in with how we worship, how we express affection, how we celebrate, what we celebrate, what our humor is, what our values are. We seemed to say, If those other people—those “aliens”—did not fit into our way of seeing things, our way of living, then the melting pot had not worked; too bad for them. We felt no guilt, and we blamed it on individualism—on the ethnic or cultural scale.

I have a sense of being in a very different place now. I am afraid that the “melting pot” image may be too much a part of our religious life incorporation. I think that we have to ask this question carefully: How do we distinguish community or congregation heritage and tradition from cultural accretions? If our congregations have a true openness to various ethnic and cultural groups, such as African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians, do we ask them how “we” can welcome, how we can become a “we” with them, how we can truly support them within the community? Do we negotiate ways of praying and worshipping at times that would accommodate them

and let us share in their gifts? Do we make accommodations at times to celebrate in their fashion? Do we make accommodations to their sense of community? Yes, we need to acknowledge plurality; remember, however, that plurality means engagement with our differences. I question whether we in American religious life are successfully meeting the challenge of welcoming vocations from various ethnic groups. It is not a question of their individualism; it is a question of ours. I believe that this is a major challenge for the future of religious life in this country, and a challenge for the church.

Religious Life: Beginning and Ending. Individualism seems to confront religious life particularly in its beginnings (postulancy, prenovitiate, and novitiate) and in its final stages (retirement or infirmity—which has a certain newness about it, since we are living longer after active working years). How to incorporate a person into our community or congregation is a question that takes a number of forms. The general question of how to incorporate needs serious attention because the older formulas, practices, and rules need radical reassessment. Even more difficult is the task of making real the true incorporation of those who are feeling useless and infirm. Our American value system, perhaps even reinforced in our culture of religious life, puts the sole value on the productive person, the one who works to earn his keep. Men, it appears, far more than women, do not know how to retire gracefully. In retirement, men tend not to sew or knit or make greeting cards; men tend to collapse or become couch potatoes before a television set or get grumpy and mean. Religious men all too often withdraw like old bears into a cave, waiting to die. Older members frequently tend not to make any effort to contribute to the congregation or community. What can superiors and congregation members do to offset this tendency among our older members? Because of the newness of the phenomenon, I am not sure that we have any answers. There is a kind of individualism here, but it needs to be faced in a different way than the types we have discussed so far.

ROLE OF LEADERSHIP

I would identify three needs that leadership should try to fill. First, leadership must fill the need to dialogue. Leaders have to be able to converse, to talk with everyone. Leaders have to hear Jesus' words over and over again: “Fear is useless; what is needed is trust.” Leaders cannot be afraid to dialogue. To dialogue, we have to be very good listeners. If we listen carefully and really hear what is being said, we will

have no time for fear. We will experience times when we are not being heard, when there is great fear of us because of our power role. At those times especially, we need to try to explain and to exemplify by our own behavior what true dialogue is: a real listening, a real respect, an ability to engage ourselves in our differences. Some anger, some pain, and surely some disappointment and frustration will result from our dialogue attempt—for others and for ourselves. We need to remember that we are entering into Jesus' experience. Jesus was the dialoguer par excellence—and he did not always meet with success.

Second, leadership needs to empower. By drawing on the grace of our leadership office, we enter others into the grace of God's empowerment. This is more than just giving someone a pat on the back, more than just giving thanks for a job well done. By the grace of office, we have the ability to enter people into the grace of valuing their worth and work. We put them in the context of God's continuing call and God's desire that they work alongside him. We have the responsibility to grace people with a sense of mission. We are empowering them because, like Jesus' first followers, they are sent; they have a dynamism provided by the God with whom they are now working.

Third, leadership needs to articulate vision. Leaders need to be the "point men" for the "we" vision. All of us need to be caught up beyond the boundaries of our own living situation and ministry. Leaders have to knit together all the various works of the province or congregation and give the picture of the "we" being on the mission. Jesus can be very attentive to the immediate need at hand, but at the same time he always continues to speak out the vision. How do we, as leaders, break out of our own individualism? Above all, by speaking out the "we" vision for our life and our ministry.

THE POPE'S CALL

In *Vita Consecrata*, his apostolic letter on religious life, the pope identifies the special responsibility of religious to be agents of communion. I personally have found it to be a stirring call to religious life at this time. The pope points out that never has there seemed to be a greater need for dialogue and reconciliation in every aspect of human living. We can start within our own church, where there are tensions between conservatives and liberals, between hierarchy and laity, sometimes even between religious and clergy. There are tensions within our congregations, between young and old, between Americans with European roots and those of different cultural backgrounds, between heterosexuals and homosexuals.

There are tensions within our civil society, between rich and poor, between African Americans and whites, between "pro-lifers" and "pro-choicers." There are tensions between religious groups: Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox, Muslim and Christian, Hindu and Muslim. There are tensions between countries in the Middle East and the Balkans, between China and Taiwan. However small we want to make the problem, or however global, we religious could act as agents of communion.

Our ability to dialogue and to reconcile is the first ministry needed of us all today. I hear the pope's call as an appropriate renewal of Saint Paul's call for Christians to be ambassadors of reconciliation. We are called to be agents of communion. How can we bring people together? How can we get them to talk with one another? Of course, that demands that we be together ourselves, that we have no one in our midst to whom we cannot talk. What a demand that puts on our community living. What a demand that puts on our way of ministering. What a direct attack on the individualism of our time it would be if we religious truly took on our responsibility to be agents of communion. Responding to the pope's call, we would certainly be going against the tendencies of our culture. We would be trying to emphasize the social capital; we would be trying to be part of the glue ourselves.

CASES

I am aware that in this article on some of the issues that individualism, in all its complexity, presents to religious life today, I have at times painted with fairly broad strokes, and I hope that religious can continue to clarify and discuss the issues through conversations with one another. Toward that end, I offer the following case studies to help engage us in reflecting carefully on the complex issue of individualism in religious life and community.

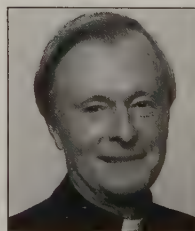
Case 1. Ricardo is a first-generation Mexican American from San Antonio, Texas. He is 32 years old and is now part of the national novitiate program in a midwestern city. Ricardo is the only Hispanic among the eight men in the program. There is a 24-year-old Vietnamese, Ricardo notes, but he was born in this country and is very Americanized. Ricardo is surprised that he finds no images of Our Lady of Guadalupe in the novitiate. In fact, the chapel and house seem rather bare of devotional pictures and images. Ricardo finds the novitiate house cold and impersonal. The other novices—mostly midwesterners with German-origin names—seem stolid and rather emotionally reserved. He

himself feels hindered in conversation and recreation because he speaks out with passion and likes to joke around. He begins to wonder whether his accent puts off his fellow novices. Do they understand what he is saying, or do they even care to ask questions and find out? He feels a little lonely. The novice director is a good man, but he seems to run everything "by the book." Ricardo asks if they could ever have a meal of tacos, enchiladas, and refried beans; he is told by the director that the cook knows only how to prepare meat and potatoes. He inquires as to whether he can teach the other novices a couple of Spanish hymns for liturgy and is told, "Maybe later." Ricardo is wondering now, after six months, whether he made a mistake in entering this congregation. You are the provincial for Ricardo and are making a visit to the novitiate community. What would your conversation be like?

Case 2. Vince is 55 years old. He has been in the congregation since he was 20. Vince has always had the reputation of being something of a loner. He seems to be a man of few words and few friends. He has been in parish work all his priestly life, usually assigned to one of the community's downtown churches, where the congregation has three or four active priests, plus four or five others who are semiretired but help out for masses, confessions, and other devotions and incidental conversations. Vince is always consistent in doing what he is assigned. He does it and then returns to his room. Since the last congregational chapter, there has been a great emphasis on community life and welcoming others into it, including inviting others into our dining room at various times of celebration. There has also been strong encouragement locally to work with other agencies in the downtown area for outreach to the poor and the transient. Priests have been asked to work with other lay ministers and some professional social workers. This work is being financed by a much-ballyhooed mutual funding

between the diocese and the regional business development agency. You have received a letter from Vince requesting a change in assignment if at all possible. He does not explain, but you have suspicions about why he is asking at this time. You are coming on a provincial visit, and you want to encourage Vince to try to stay the course. He is the youngest priest on the staff, and his work is really necessary. How would you enter into this conversation?

Case 3. Walt is 78 years old. He was involuntarily retired to a large community of ten men who live in a house with multiple ministry outlets. Walt had been a great mission man in his day, and even in his later years he loved to give retreats—at retreat centers, for the cloistered nuns in their convents, and occasionally for a parish. Walt's eyesight began failing him, and he could no longer drive or even easily read his notes for his talks. In addition, he had a bout with prostate cancer; then, shortly afterward, he had an operation for colon cancer. As a result, he has been quite weakened, but he is still not willing to put his life on a shelf. The provincial preceding you had made the decision for Walt's retirement. Walt was most unhappy with the decision and with the move to this community. The response to Walt from the members of his present community is that Walt is either so withdrawn that he contributes nothing, or he is lecturing them on all that is wrong with the world, as if they are on retreat. They want you, as Walt's provincial, to talk with him. On your visit to this community, how would you want to engage Walt?



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Listening with the Heart

Janet Malone, C.N.D., Ed.D.

The scripture passage “Be quick to listen and slow to speak” (James 1:19) may often fall on deaf ears in our fast-paced society, glutted with so much talk. The many talk shows we can access in this technological Information Age highlight the importance we give to talking. But what about listening? How many listening shows can we access?

Two ears and one mouth—is there some subtle suggestion that we need to do twice as much listening as speaking? Yet, how well does any one of us listen in the run of a day? Approximately three-quarters of our waking moments are spent in different aspects of communication. How do we use that time? On average, we would seem to listen more than we speak, if we believe the following figures, cited by Robert Bolton in his book *People Skills*: speaking 30 percent, writing 9 percent, reading 16 percent, and listening 45 percent. But do we feel listened to, and how do we listen?

According to Bolton, speaking and listening go together; they are the yin and yang of communication. Yet Diane Bone, author of *The Business of Listening*, reports that we listen at only about 25 percent of our potential. Consequently, 75 percent of what we hear is forgotten, misunderstood, or ignored. How much do we listen to what we hear? The following scenarios may resonate with some of our own life situations.

SCENARIO 1

EMPLOYEE (*Knocking on boss's open door*) Excuse me, do you have a minute?

BOSS (*Not lifting her head from newspaper*) Yeah, sure. What is it?

EMPLOYEE Well, um, I'd like to . . . Well, it's about . . . an upcoming—

BOSS (*Still reading newspaper*) I'm afraid the answer is no; our budget is overspent.

EMPLOYEE Well, actually, it's about . . . um, I'd like to—

BOSS Tell you what—come back next week when I have more definite details. (*Satisfied with her “largesse”*)

EMPLOYEE (*Blurting out the request*) But all I want is the OK to leave early today because of a doctor's appointment!

BOSS Well, why didn't you say so?

EMPLOYEE (*Exhausted by this encounter*) That's what I was trying to do!

SCENARIO 2

HUSBAND So, how was your trip?

WIFE It was good, but our trip back was rather scary.

HUSBAND (*Interrupting*) I warned you not to drive at night. Women driving late at night are just asking for trouble.

WIFE Well, actually, it wasn't at night. We were driving along on Route 123, when all of a sudden—

HUSBAND (*Interrupting*) I suppose you picked up a hitchhiker when I've warned you about such things.

WIFE No, I didn't pick up a hitchhiker. What do you take me for, anyway?

HUSBAND Well, remember shortly after we got married, when we were traveling to your parents' house that time, and you stopped for that woman and two kids?

WIFE Well, *this* time we had a blowout and lost control of the car!

SCENARIO 3

PATIENT I can't take this medication you prescribed for my high cholesterol.

DOCTOR Well, you know, it really will lengthen your life; otherwise you're in big trouble with such a high level.

PATIENT But doctor, it makes me sick to my stomach, and I throw it up. Is there another type that I could try without these side effects?

DOCTOR (*Picking up the next chart*) That's it for now; make another appointment to see me in a couple of weeks.

PATIENT (*As doctor opens door and walks out*) But doctor, I can't . . .

LISTENING: WHERE DO WE LEARN IT?

The foregoing scenarios may highlight some of our own experiences as both speakers and listeners. In a society that places so much emphasis on speaking, is listening considered unimportant? What have we been taught about these two skills? We read in Proverbs 10:19, "The more we talk, the greater the possibility of lack of charity." Let's look at what we may have learned about listening at home, in our educational settings, in church, and in society.

Home. It seems that most of us have learned nonlistening better than listening in our homes. How often have we continued to work, read the newspaper, watch television, or look around when a child, partner, or friend has attempted to share something with us?

And how often have we heard comments like these: "Don't put any stock in what he says." "Don't take her so seriously." "Don't believe a word they say; forget it." "Don't give them the satisfaction of letting them

know you heard them." "Don't listen to them; they don't know what they are talking about." "In this family, we don't listen to things like that." "Oh, just let what they say go in one ear and out the other."

Educational Settings. The emphasis in many of our educational settings tends to be on the teacher talking and the student listening. Does assuming the passive role in this context teach many students to tune out much of what is being said? Do they learn more about nonlistening than listening? Bolton writes that "immediately after the average person has listened to someone talk, he/she remembers only about half of what has been heard." In addition, most educational settings place little or no emphasis on listening skills. Students are instead taught to speak, convince, debate.

Church. Within the rhythm of our church services, what have we learned about the yin and yang of communication? Who does the speaking? Who does the listening? If prayer is not just saying prayers but also listening to God, as indicated in Psalm 46:10 ("Be still and know that I am God"), then we must ask how much of our liturgy is devoted to silence, to creating a sacred space for listening to God. As Morton Kelsey contends in *The Other Side of Silence*, "If a church or religion really wants to create community, it will provide experiences to help people learn to listen to [God] and one another."

Society. In our technological age, how many hours of talking are beamed at our senses through the different media? With the constant drone of telephone, radio, television, tapes, and compact discs, how much do we really listen?

Are our civic leaders and politicians role models for listening? Each of us has seen and heard clips from gatherings of state and national legislatures. How much speaking is done by whom? How much listening is done by whom?

Think, too, about our experiences in stores. Is a clerk or cashier talking to someone else or watching TV instead of helping the "valued customers" waiting for service? If we make inquiries, are we heard and listened to? What does inattention to others do for listening, to say nothing of basic mutual respect?

ESSENCE OF COMMUNICATION

The essence of the word *communication*, from its Latin root, is "union with." If we are to be in union with ourselves, our neighbors, and our God, then I think Jesus' threefold message of love (Luke 10: 25–28) must contextualize the ebb and flow of com-

munication, in its union of listening and speaking:

There was a scholar of the law who stood up . . . and said, "Teacher, what must I do to gain eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" He said in reply, "You shall love your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." Jesus replied to him, "You have answered correctly; do this and you shall live."

Here is the essence of our lives as Christians, the triad of charity: love of God, love of neighbor, love of self. We are very familiar with love of God. We are more or less familiar with love of neighbor, especially within the context of performing acts of charity. How familiar are we with true love of self, the third aspect of union? What have we been taught about self-love? Jesus is telling us that we can love our neighbor and, ultimately, our God, only as we love ourselves. Only then can we listen as well as speak.

SELF-LOVE

If, as scripture tells us, self-love is the basis of all our relationships, then is our inability to truly love ourselves the crux of our not being able to love and listen to others? Because we have been taught in lots of ways that we are not OK, we are constantly trying to prove ourselves, protect ourselves, and accept or love ourselves from the outside in rather than from the inside out. It is difficult to listen to each other when we have so much noise of nonacceptance going on within us.

Because many of us haven't learned to love who we are and who we are becoming, we don't listen to ourselves from the inside out. Rather, we hear lots of competing external voices telling us to be this, do that, get this in order to be loved and loving. The reality for many of us is otherwise.

Has this aspect of the universal law of charity, *caritas*, been taught much in our homes, educational settings, churches, and society? Because of our either/or, dualistic training, self-love is seen by many as individualism, selfishness, and pride, rather than as a gospel imperative and a prerequisite to loving others and God.

True self-love emphasizes that we are children of God and temples of the Holy Spirit. Each of us has needs and rights that, if ignored, may surface as efforts to be accepted, to be better than others, to come out on top—efforts that break down relationships and communication, particularly listening.

True self-love is loving others as we would want to be loved ourselves. Maybe, then, we need to learn to

do unto others as we would want them to do unto us. By not really loving ourselves as unconditionally as God loves us, we may find ourselves hearing what others say but not truly listening.

IS LISTENING THE SAME AS HEARING?

It is well known that we can hear someone without really listening to that person, as illustrated in the earlier scenarios. Hearing is the physical act of sensing different sounds. In order to listen to another person, we must first hear him or her. But hearing is not enough when it comes to the skill of listening. Perhaps we could say that hearing is the "head," and listening is the "heart." To listen, we must first hear and then move to the heart of the matter.

Listening is a skill that can be learned. It is the skill of hearing with my heart what you are sharing with me. There is the awareness that, although we may both use the same words with identical dictionary meanings (denotations), we may invest those words with different nuances (connotations) that come from our individual values, biases, prejudices, stereotypes, bigotries, and life experiences of both happiness and hurt. What all of that says is that the intention is in the speaker; the meaning is in the listener, and listening is coordinating the two.

Listening is a commitment that I truly love you as I love myself, and I show that by committing myself to understanding how you feel, what you think, and how you see the world. It could be called reflective listening, or active listening, or heart listening. In essence, I give you my undivided attention, and if I can't do that at a given moment, then I share that with you: "I really want to listen to what you're telling me, so could I have two minutes to finish this off, and then I will be with you and present to you?"

HEART SKILLS FOR LISTENING

Each of us has experienced, deep in the core of our being, specific occasions on which we have felt listened to because of both the verbal and the nonverbal aspects of the listener. What are some of the cues that give us this sense? Intuitively, we know the skills that help us feel listened to. We must use these same "door openers" to truly listen to another—cues that invite the other to open the door of his or her heart.

Although we know the heart skills for listening, reviewing them can sometimes help reinforce them. They include an invitation for another to share, good eye contact, attending with a body posture indicating interest (e.g., leaning forward), nonverbal affirmations (e.g., nodding, smiling, shaking one's head), comfortability with silence and tears as part of the ebb

and flow of communicating, noninterruptive hmms, and other short, encouraging verbalizations, such as “Could you say a little more about that?”

VERBAL SKILLS FOR LISTENING

Restating. In Proverbs 18:13 we read, “The one who answers before listening, that is that person’s folly and shame.” Restating is a skill that enhances listening before answering. It is a skill that helps us keep our focus on what the other person is really saying rather than on our own response. Learning to restate helps us stay focused on the other person and prevents our interrupting while the other person is still speaking.

How does it work? After the person has finished speaking, and before we respond, we restate or summarize, in our own words, what we think the speaker said. For example, we might say, “So what you are saying is . . .” or “Now let’s see if I understand . . .” The speaker can then respond, “Yes, that’s it” or “No, what I meant was . . .” This restating opens the door for the speaker to elaborate on what he or she said and to clarify if necessary.

Reflecting. A second skill that goes hand in hand with restating is reflecting. Again, before responding to the other person, we reflect or mirror back to the other person the possible feelings accompanying the facts. In this way we put some heart on the words. For example, we might say, “I sense you have strong feelings about this, perhaps even some fear” This open-ended reflecting of feelings gives the speaker an opportunity to clarify or confirm the feelings: “Yes, I’m really scared in this situation” or “No, actually, I’m feeling quite angry.”

Restating and reflecting skills can help us listen more attentively, with more empathy and compassion, without judging. Otherwise, we will find ourselves not listening, or pretending we’re listening while we think of other things (e.g., our response), or jumping right in while the person is talking, thus creating listening barriers.

BARRIERS TO LISTENING

Most of us have had the experience of being in the midst of sharing something and sensing the person is not listening or has stopped listening. What have we felt, deep down, when this has happened? Have we felt unimportant? Have we been tempted to stop in midsentence and leave? What are some of the verbal and nonverbal cues that tell us we are not being listened to? Most likely, we use the same listening barriers with others.

If we say we’d be happy to listen to another person—and then continue to read, watch television, shuffle papers or files, answer the phone, carry on a side conversation with another person, look away, interrupt, or advise—then are we giving the message that the other is not really important, that what he or she has to say doesn’t really interest us?

Given all the possible blocks to listening, it is amazing that we manage to listen at all. Perhaps naming and highlighting some of the more obvious blocks may help us become more aware.

- *Diagnosing:* “What your problem is . . .”
- *Advising:* “What you need to do in this situation is . . .”
- *Moralizing:* “A good Christian would look at it this way . . .”
- *Debating:* “I can’t believe you see it like that! Obviously, you don’t know . . .”
- *Diverting:* “Oh, that’s nothing. Wait till I tell what happened to me . . .”
- *Patronizing:* “Your lack of experience really shows up here . . .”
- *Being right:* “No, that’s not how it is; let me explain the real facts to you . . .”
- *Criticizing:* “You are so stupid; I told you that . . .”
- *Mind reading:* “Oh, I just knew you were going to say that . . .”

The following poem sums up these blocks succinctly:

LISTEN

When I ask you to listen to me
and you start giving advice,
you have not done what I asked.
When I ask you to listen to me and
you begin to tell me why I shouldn’t
feel that way,
you are trampling on my feelings.
When I ask you to listen to me and
you feel you have to do something to
solve my problems,
you have failed me,
strange as that may seem.
Perhaps that’s why prayer works for
some people.
Because God is silent and doesn’t
offer advice or try to fix things.
God just listens and trusts me
to work it out for myself.
So, please, just hear and listen to me.
And if you want to talk, wait a few minutes
for your turn
and I promise
I will listen to you.

—Anonymous

COMMITMENT AND CHALLENGE

Every one of us yearns to be truly listened to, but many of us have found it difficult to find someone who really knows how to listen. The aim of this article has been to clarify what listening is all about. Because the only person any one of us can change is ourself, we each do well to return at times to our own listening skills and, if necessary, "change our hearts of stone to hearts of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26).

Listening is a commitment; it is also a challenge. It is a concrete way of revealing how much we really love ourselves, because our self-love and self-esteem are many times mirrored in how we are with others—our parents, children, siblings, friends, colleagues, God.

To put aside our own concerns, needs, ideas, and biases when listening to another is the enacting of what Jesus tells us: "Be quick to listen and slow to speak."

Adapting a poem by Stella Magers, O.S.F., perhaps our prayer could be:

I seek a heart that is attuned to listen
to the sounds of human life—
The murmurings of pain and struggle,
The bubble of confusion and doubt,
The whisperings of yearnings,
The ecstatic outburst of joy and delight!
I seek a heart with an interior vision
That "sees" beyond the exterior—
The peacefulness of a life well spent,
The prayerfulness of the quiet,
The agony of the fearful,
The loneliness of the complainer.
I seek a heart imbued with feeling

That can penetrate closed walls—
Walls that shut out closeness,
Walls that prohibit friendship,
Walls that choke out life.
I seek a heart that can open new avenues to life
By a recognition of goodness,
A freeing of humanness,
And an appreciation of God's wonders.
I seek a heart that is
self-love centered,
other-love centered,
God-love centered,
A heart of flesh, transformed from a heart of stone.
God, give me a heart of flesh;
I've had a heart of stone for so long.

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Forming Formators Collaboratively

Joel Giallanza, C.S.C.

The selection and preparation of formators have been consistent topics of reflection and discussion in recent years. It is encouraging that major superiors and others have focused their attention on these important issues. Even though the number of entrants to religious life has been declining in some parts of the world, religious institutes have not compromised their concern for the quality of the formators who will work with those who do enter. The church itself has consistently maintained a perspective that emphasizes the importance of the ministry of formation and those who serve in it.

That religious institutes and the church have affirmed and even insisted on the priority of selecting and preparing quality and qualified formators is not surprising; indeed, it is to be expected. Formation to religious life has always been esteemed as a particularly graced period. Thus, the church and religious institutes make special provisions to ensure that those in formation and their formators are not burdened or distracted with tasks and responsibilities unrelated to the goals of the formation process.

As the number of those entering religious life has declined, institutes have combined and coordinated their efforts to establish a variety of inter-institute programs to provide courses, workshops, and other experiences that explore the general elements of con-

temporary religious life. Individual institutes can then focus on teaching and transmitting their own unique heritage and history to those in formation. Such inter-institute programs have some distinct advantages. Besides offering to those in formation a common pool of information about religious life today, these programs provide a valuable forum for interaction with a larger group of peers. Likewise, the formators themselves benefit by meeting, working with, and learning from others in this ministry. Such a network of support can be a valuable resource, especially for those in formation and for formators who are alone in their programs.

In 1998 the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life issued an instruction entitled *Inter-Institute Collaboration for Formation*. The document is the first to focus exclusively on the collaboration that inevitably and necessarily takes place among religious institutes that utilize common programs.

The first section, "Fundamental Principles and Practical Directives," emphasizes that each institute "has primary responsibility for its own identity" and that genuine collaboration among institutes "contributes to a greater appreciation of the charism of one's own institute as well as that of others." The second section, "Collaboration in the Various Phases

of Formation,” makes recommendations regarding the four main areas of formation—prenovitiate, novitiate, postnovitiate, and continuing—noting that “the organization of the programs ought to offer effective help for doctrinal formation and for vocational growth.” The third section, “Institutes of Religious Studies and of Philosophical and Theological Formation,” stresses that because formation includes those preparing for both lay and ordained ministries, programs must be “mindful of the characteristics proper to each group.” The final section, “Inter-Institute Collaboration for the Formation of Formators,” covers the principles and perspectives examined in this article.

MINISTRY OF FORMATION

The first area on which the last section of the document focuses is the ministry of formation itself. Reflective of the church’s perspective, formators are identified as involved in an “authentic ecclesial ministry,” characterized as “the art of arts.” The fundamental task of formators is the accompaniment of those entering religious life. That accompaniment includes teaching, guiding, and challenging. Such a task assumes that formators “know the world of the young” and are “very familiar with the path of seeking God.” To be effective, formators must have a “serious and solid preparation, and a generous and total dedication in their commitment to be imitators of Christ in the service of their brothers and sisters.”

The importance of this ministry is precisely why “careful attention in the selection and preparation of those responsible for formation remains a top priority.” The document does not hesitate to identify the qualities and skills necessary in contemporary formators. Six are highlighted. Though more could be derived from the variety of situations and programs in which formators live and minister, those mentioned constitute a firm foundation on which to build other personal and professional abilities. The first three are related to the personal qualities of the formator; the second three reflect skills that formators teach and pass on to those in formation.

By the quality of their personal life, formators must be, first of all, “men and women of God.” Maintaining a vital relationship with God as a vowed religious is among the most significant witnesses that formators can offer to those they serve. Apart from that relationship, both formation and religious life itself lose their core meaning as a way of following Jesus and continuing his message and mission. Second, formators must be “respectful discerners of the human heart and the ways of the Spirit.” The principles

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of formation to religious life cannot be applied like spray paint on a piece of furniture; they must be tailored to the rich diversity of individual personalities, perspectives, and preferences. Discerning the human heart and the Spirit’s ways assumes that the formator has taken seriously the task of self-knowledge, the discipline of exploring one’s own heart and discovering the Lord who dwells there. Third, formators must be “capable of responding to [the needs of those in formation] for greater interiority, experience of God, fraternity and initiation to their mission.” This responsiveness summarizes the first two qualities and reflects the basic spiritual needs often expressed by members of Generations X and Y. Formators can most effectively respond to those needs by the example of their lives, combined with the clarity of their teaching.

With the skills they use to guide those in formation, formators must first “know how to teach discernment, docility and obedience.” Teaching these practices effectively will have a distinctive and determining influence on the future quality of religious life. In the coming years, religious must be able to discover and live God’s will for self, community, and mission through a discipline of discernment and by a docile and obedient response.

Formators must also be capable of “reading the signs of the times and people’s needs.” This is an extension of the first skill; nevertheless, it does emphasize the content of the discernment and response

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that must be communicated by formators. The relevance of religious life is measured by its realism, by its ability to identify what is going on within the apostolate and to determine what to do in response.

In addition, formators must have the capacity for “teaching their charges to respond to those needs with solicitude and courage, in full ecclesial communion.” This reiterates and capsulizes the preceding two skills and completes the cycle of training that formation initiates within those entering religious life. The continuation of Jesus’ mission is assured by the constant and consistent responsiveness to present and emerging needs in union with the church.

It is not surprising, then, when the document notes that “this ministry [formation] is one of the most difficult and delicate.” Its difficulty and delicacy are rooted in the same reality: the beauty and complexity of the human person. The journey on which formators accompany others is truly sacred. The difficulty lies in knowing the methods and means of accompanying another with reverence and challenge. The delicacy lies in the sensitivity necessary to discern and distinguish the nuances of God’s self-revelation in one’s own life and in the lives of those in formation.

SELECTION OF FORMATORS

The document presents a significant challenge to major superiors by indicating that “as their primary

responsibility, [they] should choose future formators carefully so that a religious family may have available members qualified for such a ministry.” From my experience and observation, most formators learn about this ministry after they have been assigned to and begun the work at hand. The training process becomes very much a matter of learning directly from one’s experience and then using that experience to formulate principles and perspectives that gradually mark one’s approach. Few are the instances when major superiors can select and train formators in advance, so the pool of “available members qualified for such a ministry” becomes more a rarity than a reality.

There is surely a large part of formation ministry that must be learned from the experience of working and interacting with, guiding and accompanying those in formation. In fact, this learning is indispensable because formation ministry is not theoretical; it is eminently pastoral and practical. Still, some formal preparation and continuing education can be of tremendous value for understanding the inner dynamics of the formation process.

The shortage of personnel remains a stark reality that creates regular and sometimes serious dilemmas for major superiors in terms of responding to present ministerial commitments and planning those of the future. Formation is not immune to the effects of the personnel shortage. Nevertheless, if formation is to be maintained as a priority for the future quality of life in the institute, then the identification of members who could be called upon for this ministry should be a regular part of the planning process. Before the terms of office of current formators are completed, sufficient time should be allotted to provide potential formators with some opportunity to become familiar with the theology and practice of contemporary formation and with the actual programs of the institute.

The document outlines what could be included in such a familiarization process. Highlighted is the need to “assure the necessary theological and pedagogical formation, spiritual formation, competence in the human sciences, and specific training for the tasks to be carried out on the journey of formation.” All this need not be addressed at once. Those preparing to enter formation ministry could explore these areas over a period of time, extending beyond the beginning of their involvement in the ministry. Such an overlapping of preparation and practice facilitates a rich dialogue between academic material related to formation ministry and the actual vocational journeys of those being served in the programs.

In addition to these general areas, “formators should be expert particularly in the matters which re-

fer to the spiritual patrimony of the founder or foundress." Appointment to formation ministry, even with advance notice, comes with no magic formula for acquiring fluency in the history and heritage of the institute. Since this is a fundamental part of what is to be communicated and transmitted to those entering religious life, potential formators must have access to and become familiar with the primary resources necessary for studying and teaching the spirit of the founding person(s). That same access and familiarity must become a regular part of the formator's own continuing education and formation.

The document "urges religious families to continue developing efforts toward the adequate preparation of those responsible for initial and continuing formation." The church recognizes that serious efforts are being made to prepare potential formators. The key is for major superiors to be attentive so that complacency does not replace priority in identifying and training future formators. Similar to those in the ministry of authority, formators should not be expected to remain in office for an indeterminate period of time. Thus, even as a new formator is appointed and begins ministry in a formation program, others who could serve in this ministry should be identified so that the preparation for their training can be planned. This is a significant means of maintaining the priority of formation, which—possibly more than any other internal ministry—has a direct influence on the quality of religious life in the future.

INTER-INSTITUTE COLLABORATION

Some elements of the preparation mentioned in the preceding section are necessarily the responsibility of the formator's particular institute. Proper law, the spirituality of the founding person(s), and the history and heritage of the institute are best learned through workshops and courses designed to focus on religious life within that institute. I offered some reflections on this kind of training in an earlier issue of *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT* ("Specialized Training for Religious Formators," Spring 2000).

Inevitably, religious institutes will have to support and assist one another in providing quality preparation and continuing education for formators. This support and assistance must be more than a simple response to the inevitability of limited resources. It is a desired enrichment that extends beyond any single institute. The document states that, "given the urgent need for qualified formators, this dicastery invites institutes to intensify inter-institute collaboration, making available for each other programs, experiences, and, to the extent possible, even the most qualified personnel for mutual enrichment in

benefit of the institutes, of the Church, and of her mission in the world."

The courses offered through inter-institute collaboration can cover many areas that are beyond a single institute's capacity to address. The document is extensive in citing criteria for courses provided by inter-institute programs. The purpose guiding the organization of these courses is comprehensive: it must aim at "preparing educators for the task of the integral formation of a religious in the unity and uniqueness of the person, developing all the dimensions of baptismal and religious consecration." To accomplish this purpose, inter-institute programs "should contribute to a formation which is doctrinal, spiritual, canonical, and pedagogical-pastoral. In particular they should ensure solid theological formation, especially in the fields of spirituality, moral theology, and religious life." This formidable challenge would be insurmountable without the willingness to collaborate and the combined resources of several institutes.

Two areas are highlighted as priorities to be maintained. First, "the courses should above all help the formators in transmitting the art of a theological reading of the signs of the times so as to discern the presence, the love, and the will of God in all things." Such discernment has always been and must continue to be a primary responsibility among religious. As formators are trained and practiced in this "art," they will become proficient in teaching that discernment to those in formation. Second, "the organization of courses should give proper importance to the topic of fraternal life in community and to the mission of the institutes and should offer the means adequate for consolidating or recovering the spirit of unity and co-responsibility among the members, an apostolic spirit and an attitude of justice, solidarity, and mercy toward the most needy." These areas represent some major concerns that religious life seeks to address and for which it desires to be a witness, today and tomorrow.

When all this is combined with the specialized training provided by individual institutes, formators are assured of receiving a sound and holistic preparation for their ministry. And as formators take advantage of opportunities for continued learning and training, they will strengthen even further the quality of their presence and activity in ministry.

LIVING THE GOALS

The document cites six goals that courses provided by inter-institute programs should strive to achieve. These goals are particularly interesting because they indicate what qualities and abilities for-

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maters need if they are to be consistent and effective in their work.

First, courses offered by inter-institute programs should assist formators in developing and refining skills directly related to their ministry of serving those who seek to make a commitment to religious life. Three of the goals cited can be included in this area. Such courses "should develop the formators' ability to relate, listen, discern vocations, guide, and educate young people and adults to discernment and commitment." This ability is necessary for the everyday work of formators and has a direct influence on the quality of their ministry. This relating, listening, discerning, guiding, and educating shape the very nature of contemporary formation ministry. In addition, these courses "should develop the formators' ability to accompany another spiritually, pedagogically, and psychologically." Formation ministry is multifaceted, requiring formators to enter the lives of those with whom they work on several levels and in a variety of capacities. The skills required to do this must be regularly updated if such entry is to respect the rich diversity of personal experiences among those in formation. At the same time, formators must be ready to call on "the help of experts when necessary." A third goal in this area is that "formators should learn how to prepare the members of their communities for the task of the New Evangelization: announcing Christ, the Good News of the Father, to all men and women." Such learning reflects the formators' com-

mitment to a major apostolic priority of the church. This learning is also a challenge to formators "to welcome the hopes and questions of youth, children of our time, who are entering communities and prepare them to incarnate the best of their own epoch and give a response of holiness and of effective charity to the needs of our times."

Courses offered by inter-institute programs should train formators to see beyond the immediate context of their ministry so they can interpret the situation of the society and culture in which they live and minister. Two goals mentioned in the document are included in this area. Such courses "should help one read and understand the diverse cultural contexts in order to promote a formation consonant with the demands of the culture of origin and of the religious or with the culture of the people among whom they will be working." Formation must respect the culture in which it takes place. Formators, then, must be adaptable enough to learn from the culture those values and perspectives which communicate the nature of religious life to the people, and especially to those exploring a religious vocation. A second goal is to "help formators know and respond to the challenges which the Church faces in our time and take up the pastoral priorities which the Holy Father and the bishops in union with him propose for the reflection of the faithful." The mission and ministries of religious institutes must pursue their course within the mission of the church. It is important that formators be able to communicate to those in formation that, more than becoming members of a single institute, they are participants in the worldwide efforts to continue the message and mission of Jesus.

Third, courses offered by inter-institute programs can also enrich the personal lives of formators. Indeed, they should strive to do precisely that, since the preceding goals can be fully realized only in and through the lives of the formators. The document presents the challenge clearly: "Courses for formators should provide an experience of spiritual growth and contribute to their continuing formation. The responsibility of accompanying young people on their journey of growth includes a constant invitation from Christ, Master and Lord, to intensify the life of prayer, intimacy with him, and to embrace the cross which seals this delicate ministry of formation, placing always one's own trust in his guidance and his grace." Even though formation utilizes the resources of many professions and technologies, formators should never lose sight of the truth that their ministry must be intensely personal also. The witness of a religious commitment lived with passion and integrity can teach others more about following and living the

example of Jesus than precise professions and tractable technologies. Living with passion and integrity lies at the very heart of formation ministry today.

These goals must be lived; they cannot be relegated to a wall of certificates indicating courses completed and degrees done. As the document notes, "the preparation of formators may not be merely intellectual, doctrinal, pastoral, and professional; it is, above all, a deep, human, and religious experience of sharing in the mystery of Christ while respectfully approaching the mystery of the human person." In this regard, formation is truly a sacred ministry; formators have the privilege of walking into the heart of another individual—the very dwelling place of God. Furthermore, these goals are not achieved completely through the isolated efforts of individuals. Formators can be of tremendous support to one another by sharing experiences, perspectives, and insights: "In this light it is helpful that formators be able to meet among themselves as consecrated persons, to support one another on their journey of faith, to pray together, to let themselves be questioned by the Word, and to celebrate the Eucharist." Such inter-institute collaboration at these formal and informal levels "is a concrete response to the calls of the Church to help a religious by promoting his or her unity of life in Christ through the Spirit."

HUMAN AND CHRISTIAN FULLNESS

The document points out that "consecrated persons are called to insert themselves in the contemporary world to offer valid models of human and Christian fullness, according to the form of life which Christ the Lord chose, which Mary, Virgin and Mother embraced, and which he himself proposed to his disciples." The privileged task of formators is to prepare those entering religious life today to be models of human and Christian fullness for the future by preparing them and accompanying them into this insertion in the contemporary world.

That task will be completed most effectively if formators themselves are such models for those with whom they work. The continuing formation of formators must lead them toward integrating whatever knowledge and skills will nurture their efforts to be such models.

Formators, then, are called to be witnesses for the present, demonstrating to those in formation a religious life that is passionate and zealous in its love for and service to the institute, the church, and the mission of Jesus among the people. Also, they are called to be mentors for the future, transmitting whatever is necessary for those in formation to become witnesses to the world through their commitment to a religious life marked by vitality and integrity. Such passion and zeal, vitality and integrity can transform the world.

"Thus religious will fulfill their mission as Christians called to be a living memorial of Jesus' way of living and acting, and moved by God to be pioneers on the missionary road and the paths of the Spirit," the document concludes. "With the new ardor of their lives and of their word, with new methods and new expressions of their works, they will be faithful and bold instruments of God, signs of hope in serving others by revealing to them the love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ." This is the mission for which the formators of today must be formed so they can prepare the religious of tomorrow to continue that same mission. This is the mission for which formators must become witnesses for today and mentors for tomorrow.



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Narcissism Sets Stage for Clergy Sexual Abuse

Paul Duckro, Ph.D., and Marc Falkenhain, Ph.D.

The percentage of diocesan clergy and religious involved in the sexual abuse of minors is not high relative to the population at large, and anecdotal clinical evidence suggests that it is declining as a problem. However, when sexual abuse by clergy occurs, the effects are devastating. There is great pain to all involved: victim, perpetrator, religious leadership, and the church at large. It is not too strong to describe it as a cancer on the church.

Much has been done; much remains to be done. Effective clinical response, including accurate diagnosis and treatment, is essential—but the optimal response is prevention. Prevention, however, requires that we learn much more about the persons who go on to abuse. In the early stages of this problem, the acting out is indirect, infrequent, or otherwise so subtle that it can be missed easily.

Intimate knowledge of this type of individual comes in many ways. The accumulated clinical experience of those who have worked with sexual abusers is important. The wisdom of spiritual directors who have not been afraid to address the whole human being serves as a reliable standard. In the mix, it is also important to recognize the contributions that empirical research can make.

There is some empirical research regarding the personality patterns of sexual abusers. However, most

of this research has been done with populations other than clergy. It has been hard to gain access to data regarding clergy who are abusers, for a variety of reasons. They constitute a small group, for one thing, and the facilities specializing in their treatment are few in number.

Most of the research that has been done has used designs that assume some similarity across all sexual abusers. Yet the assumption that persons with the same problem will have the same causative factors has not been supported in most areas of study. As Gordon Benson notes in an article titled "Sexual Behavior by Male Clergy with Adult Female Counselees: Systemic and Situational Themes," sexual abusers have been found to demonstrate a range of characteristics.

An alternative research method is cluster analysis, which was developed to identify subgroupings within a population. Because it assumes that there will be different subtypes of sexual abusers, it is an appropriate and potentially fruitful method for studying their personality patterns. The technique has been used successfully to study nonclergy abusers.

A recent article by the authors of this paper and others in *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity* reports the first use of cluster analysis to study a group of abusers who were male religious and/or clergy. Four

subgroups of abusers were identified. The individuals in the smallest group demonstrated frank psychiatric illness. Those in another group had a passive and dependent personality style; they were uncomfortable in social situations, not very psychological-minded, and emotionally insecure.

The remaining two subgroups were characterized by narcissistic personality features. The individuals in one group were classically narcissistic, with little insight into the self. These men were facile socially and little troubled emotionally. They were successful in ministry and quite agreeable companions in superficial situations. The individuals in the second group were equally lacking in insight, but the interior experience was characterized by resentment and hostility. These men were conflicted in their relationships with others. They struggled with bouts of guilt and remorse but were prone to resolve such episodes in self-serving ways. Their desire was to be approved of by others, but with their passive-aggressive style and inner hostility, they were not very successful in this regard.

The results of the study highlight the importance of narcissism as a factor increasing the danger that a person will be a sexual abuser. As Benson reports, narcissism is a commonly found, prominent personality feature among professionals who cross sexual boundaries. In his address to the National Catholic Education Association in 1998, Bishop John Kinney spoke of this characteristic as an "attitude of entitlement," prominent among those clergy and religious who sexually abuse. Clearly, any effort at prevention must consider the identification and transformation of narcissism. In this article, we will explore the nature of narcissism and the ways in which it might be mitigated in the formation of future priests and religious.

WHAT IS NARCISSISM?

In its most severe form, narcissism may manifest as a personality disorder. The title "disorder" is warranted when personality characteristics are pervasive and inflexibly applied to life situations. In general terms, narcissism is described in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition* (DSM-IV) as a pervasive pattern of grandiosity, need for admiration, and lack of empathy. There is a sense of entitlement, of being special or unique and, for that reason, able to operate outside the usual limitations or rules of societal groups. Relationships with the narcissist often go well as long as they remain superficial or if the other person recognizes the "special" qualities of the narcissist. Of course, this type of relationship is very one-sided. Envy, resentment, and

hurt are strongly evident in the narcissist if the other person in the relationship does not respond as expected. In a manner of speaking, in his automatic reactions, the narcissist "keeps forgetting" that other people have perceptions, needs, and desires uniquely their own. He must be constantly reminded, "It's not all about you."

Narcissistic personality disorder is not a pleasant experience for most of those whom the narcissist encounters. Life's wake is littered with the detritus of broken relationships. However, the narcissist is not an evil person, consciously manipulating others. Most narcissists experience themselves as very generous and giving. They just don't understand the impact of their own hurt, the insensitivity of their coping style, or the extent to which their perceptions and the perceptions of others differ.

It is not easy for narcissists, either. They often end up feeling overworked from their efforts to please others and to be successful. They try so hard—an unconscious method of compensating for low self-esteem—but in the end, their efforts leave them feeling valued for their achievements and not for themselves. Most cannot cease striving long enough to see that imperfection or even failure, freely admitted, would not earn them rejection or undying shame.

A comprehensive perspective on narcissism as a risk factor leads to two further distinctions. First, all narcissists are not the same. The DSM-IV describes the classic, or overt, narcissist. As demonstrated in the results of our own research, there is a different sort of narcissist who is just as convinced of being special or superior but who is much more vulnerable internally and cautious interpersonally. This person has been described as the covert narcissist. Life is experienced much more painfully by the covert narcissist and, because of that pain, the covert narcissist may be more open to change. Whereas the overt narcissist must often experience catastrophic external consequences ("hit bottom") before change is even considered necessary, the covert narcissist may experience enough guilt or shame that an invitation to therapeutic work can be entertained earlier in the cycle.

Second, the DSM-IV describes narcissistic personality disorder, the most severe form of narcissism, which is found in only about one percent of the population in the United States, and more often among men. As a characteristic or feature of the personality style, narcissism is much more common. Narcissistic personality characteristics can be considered along a continuum. A person with no narcissistic characteristics would probably be considered to have unhealthily low self-esteem. Among persons who are in leadership positions of various types, narcissism is

The psychological evaluation must not be considered a one-time event or a “hoop” through which the successful candidate must jump

an expected and effective quality. On the other hand, one can have too much of a good thing. Narcissistic qualities, as they become more pervasive and prominent, do inhibit the development of mutual, loving relationships. Narcissistic features both reflect and prevent the resolution of underlying insecurity. Instead of working with insecurity by expressing and seeking connection, the narcissist tries to compensate for the insecurity by achieving and impressing. The resulting excessive focus on self prevents real empathy from forming.

The most positive qualities of narcissism as a personality characteristic are leadership and self-esteem. The most negative qualities are a sense of superiority and a sense of entitlement. Arguably, the latter characteristic is the most dangerous. The sense of entitlement leads to extensive and convincing rationalization of very damaging behavior. Relationships are about “me” and “what I need.” Planning is focused around how to achieve “what I need.” The sense of “never enough” is very strong, even though to others it seems that the opposite is true. From this sense of deprivation, the bending of rules can be justified, setting the stage for abuse of authority. The narcissist’s own needs are placed above those of others because he has the sense that his needs are never met. In sexual abuse, this sense of entitlement leads to the exploitation of others.

PREVENTION PRIMARY CONCERN

As Bishop Kinney pointed out in his presentation to open the Interfaith Sexual Trauma Institute con-

ference in 1999, prevention must be the primary concern of all those seeking to heal the problems of sexual abuse in the church. The research cited indicates clearly that prevention must include addressing unhealthy narcissistic characteristics among candidates for ordination and/or religious life. Narcissistic characteristics must be recognized and worked with in the course of formation. Seminary intervention is therefore a critical aspect of the prevention of sexual abuse by clergy.

Formation to modify personality characteristics and sexual health remains a sensitive subject. In a recent article in *Review for Religious*, Father Robert Nugent notes that the document *Pastores Dabo Vobis* states unequivocally that candidates for priesthood must have assistance in developing healthy human relationships and achieving psychosexual maturity. Yet he goes on to describe the limited and guarded response he received from all but two of the seminaries he sought to survey on the subject.

How might we respond to this need in ways that are both effective and sensitive? Screening at admission is important. Some type of psychological screening is almost always requested of applicants to major seminaries. However, the specificity with which the screening is described is not always sufficient to avoid superficial efforts. In addition, some screenings continue to be focused only on ruling out major psychological diagnoses—so-called Axis I problems. This type of screening is necessary but not sufficient. Its “yield” is not great, since relatively few persons with major psychiatric illness make it through other, nonpsychological screening.

We suggest that the most effective screening requires a developmental perspective. The evaluator looks for imbalances in personal development in individuals who are otherwise generally healthy. It is important to consider intimacy skills, friendship capacity, conflict resolution, and sense of appropriate mutuality.

The psychological evaluation must not be considered a one-time event or a “hoop” through which the successful candidate must jump. Ideally, the results of the evaluation are shared orally with the candidate in a conversational format, complementing the written report. Persons responsible for the formation of the candidate must be part of this type of conversation if the ground is to be set for ongoing review.

The information gleaned in this feedback process can then be incorporated into formation plans. These plans, addressing the social and emotional maturation of the candidate, are often attempted in major seminaries. Like the screening process, however, these plans are often not sufficiently specific to be useful. Also, they are often not followed up consistently

over years of formation. Goals to be achieved, methods for achieving them, and funding to support professional intervention are sometimes not included.

Consistency and specificity are particularly important in dealing with the person who has prominent narcissistic features. Narcissism cannot be included in formation plans with the idea that it will be remedied in a semester. In many ways, it is more realistic for the individual and the formation team to recognize that it will be a lifelong project.

As a personality style, narcissism is by definition difficult to change. In addition, unlike some problematic personality styles, narcissism is not experienced as a problem for the individual in question until its consequences are severe enough to cause real pain. For the narcissist, matters often do not reach this stage for many years.

What can be done is to help the candidate change direction and work out a strategy for recognizing and working with narcissism. Changing the attitude of the narcissist requires first helping him to see the ways in which he is causing hurt to others. This must be done with care and patience, as the narcissistic style is rooted in early experiences of hurt, and the ego is more fragile than it appears. However, because the quality of narcissism is deeply ingrained and resistant to change, the response must be consistent and challenging, with real engagement at the emotional and social level.

Feedback must balance honesty with genuine care. Caring without honesty simply perpetuates the problem; honesty without caring or compassion is too hard to take. Members of the formation team who take on this work must be prepared to deal with the confusion, accusations, and hurt that will necessarily follow.

Clearly, the seminary is not a therapeutic community, but it is important to recognize that the atmosphere of the seminary is a critical factor. If it is only a place of intellectual and interior formation, social and emotional barriers to healthy living will go unresolved. On the other hand, if there is an overall emphasis on real relationship and a willingness to handle conflict directly and constructively, healing will occur naturally. Those who interact with the narcissistic character will bring forward those frustrations that signal the need for change. Working them through will effect the change.

PROMOTING HEALING ENVIRONMENT

Education increases the likelihood that the seminarians will have reasonable and appropriate expectations of each other with regard to respecting boundaries and individual differences in social perception.

Education of the formation team increases the likelihood that problematic behaviors will be recognized. There is a place for courses in human development—sexual, social, emotional, and physical. Ideally, these courses will be more than intellectual explorations, evoking self-reflection and behavioral change.

A general sense of openness about things psychological will also encourage seminarians to discuss experiences with each other. This kind of talking about relationships is quite different from gossip, which seeks to find or assign blame. Talking with friends about relationships seeks understanding about self and others. This kind of sharing helps bring to light the remarkable differences among individual perceptions of the same events. It also develops the kind of sensitivity necessary to become aware of the need for change and the willingness to enter the process.

Increased self-knowledge leads to greater awareness of the interior emotional currents. Emotions may be difficult to interpret, but strong feelings are absolutely reliable as signals that something needs attention. Benson found that the abusers he and his colleagues studied often acted out when they were lonely, overwhelmed, and feeling bad about themselves.

Repeated conflict with others is the surest indication of a social problem and a marker for troublesome narcissistic characteristics. Disagreements and emotional flareups are the stuff of every life, but a continuous pattern of such conflict is a different matter. When the reaction of the individual is typically to blame the others involved, to feel misunderstood, to express rage out of proportion to the offense, and to ascribe motivations that seem unduly convoluted, one might be justified in suspecting that narcissistic character features are being acted out.

Ongoing psychological consultation to the formation team is valuable. Rather than waiting until psychological problems demand attention, some teams have incorporated a psychologist into the regular team meetings. When the seminarians are discussed, the psychological perspective is woven into the general picture. This approach increases the likelihood that problems will be discovered early.

Finally, it is necessary that those responsible for the formation of future priests become aware of their own narcissistic characteristics and make a commitment to work on them. With honest and caring feedback from reliable peers, anyone can find the courage to face one's own personality style and the information necessary to change.

This article has described a general plan that might be employed in formation settings. While implementing these ideas requires commitment and perseverance, the plan is not so grand as to be daunting.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to close without recognizing how great is the challenge of changing seminary culture.

In Catholic seminaries, the culture is almost entirely male. This is an unusual culture, no longer often found in the United States. Paradoxically, because men are much more likely to struggle with narcissism, it is much harder to spot from the inside of an all-male culture.

In addition, there is a natural sense of privilege among seminarians, who are preparing to take up a vocation that is still highly regarded. Even those who have little understanding of the priesthood still tend to view it with a certain degree of awe and wonder. Many family members, friends, parishioners, and others respond differently to the boy or man who says he wants to be a priest. To receive that reaction from others may itself be an attraction to the narcissist, becoming one of the unhealthy factors drawing him to the seminary.

The seminary itself often reflects a sense of hierarchy. The seminarian, of course, occupies a lower rank in that hierarchy, but with the clear expectation that advancement will follow if he perseveres to ordination.

Seminary formation is a multifaceted process. Seminarians and those responsible for their formation are busy people. They must attend to academic, theological, spiritual, and ecclesiological development. It is not surprising that psychological and social issues might take a back seat, especially if they seem too intrusive or difficult.

There is a tendency for young seminarians to emphasize the spiritual solution over the psychological or social. If there is support for the idea that personality and behavior issues should be handled only in the internal forum, then much of the power of relationships to effect self-healing will be lost.

A WORTHWHILE CHALLENGE

Our prescription for dealing with narcissism is not easy for communities of men to implement. Whether

for reasons biological or sociological, men (as a group) are not as adept as women at the business of processing emotions and perceptions. Men are prone to argue ideas rather than to share feelings, to bark loudly enough to keep others at bay rather than to invite discussion.

However, we cannot afford not to try. In the many difficult years since the scandal of sexual abuse by priests and religious first surfaced, there has been great progress. The flood of treatment referrals seems to have peaked. The future lies in extending that progress, with attention to prevention. This can be done with a combination of early detection, behavior modification in the course of formation, professional consultation, and a positive ideal of social and sexual health among celibate men. We hope the ideas in this article will further the effort.

RECOMMENDED READING

Benson, G. "Sexual Behavior by Male Clergy with Adult Female Counselees: Systemic and Situational Themes." *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity* 1, no. 2 (1994): 103-18.

Nugent, R. "Helping Seminarians Live Celibate Chastity." *Review for Religious* 59, no. 1 (January/February 2000): 66-78.



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Los Consentidos

James Torrens, S.J.

Table for One

"Table for one, monsieur?" I nod.
Humbly the maitre d', bowing me there,
whisks away all the superfluous
napkins and silver. A waiter arrives
with toothy smile and a large plate
monogrammed and reading,
"The Humbletonian." I'm curious.
It's all in the presentation, I'm told.
"What's this?" "Humble pie, monsieur."
Hmm. I look up. There in the kitchen
women of humble origin, early risers,
rolling a crust. Some of the less humble,
hands on their hips, glaring.
Out the back door a nation we've humbled
delivers pineapples, bananas,
kiwis. The whole world is watching.
"Come on, captain, eat. It'll do you good."
A small voice at my ear says, "Yes,
get it down while there's still time."

like "consented," though the more accurate translation is "spoiled." The parents are agreeable to whatever the child wants. That the *niño consentido* (*mimado* is the more common word for it) has overwhelmingly been male is an embarrassing cultural fact. One can only hope that the numbers of such children of both genders are dwindling.

In an earlier age, it is said, most of the children treated this way were "love children," born out of wedlock. Their parents had not shown much discipline or responsibility in bringing them into the world, and so did not find themselves authorized or disposed to closely monitor them afterwards. Such, at least, is the historical gossip about children born to privileged classes under the bar sinister.

In reality, the spoiled child is a pervasive reality of our culture and our times. Not so long ago, those of us teaching and living as dormitory counselors in Catholic colleges could apply this designation pretty readily to children of wealthy parents from foreign countries. Now it has come much closer to home. The spirit of entitlement, the sense that you have everything coming to you, has spread its infection widely.

A college theology teacher just recounted to me his conversation with a young man about his final

In Mexico or farther south, one will hear a child at times referred to as *consentido*. *Consentido* sounds

Some of God's most beneficial treatment of us has to be honestly described in the contemporary language of tough love

grade, B minus. He made the point to the student that people cannot be equally good at everything or be equally studious about every subject, adding that he himself had been pretty much a B student. Not mollified, the undergraduate kept up a voluble protest. The teacher took another close look at his grade book and told the student that, yes, he could stretch the evaluation to a B, without the "minus." At that, the young man exploded: "B?! I deserve an A!" No wonder teachers dread the moment of grading.

I recall a class I took in graduate school in the sixties, on the neoclassical age in English literature. The professor had awarded me a B. A kindly man, he told me a bit sheepishly soon afterwards that he probably should have given me an A. Truth to tell, though, I was happy enough to have gotten a B, given the limited amount of reading I could do for the course. I had to reassure the man that his original instinct and judgment had been accurate. In the matter of grading, as with much else over the years, I know I have been *consentido*. Professor Ogden was merely righting the balance a little. Alas, the teacher can no longer with impunity make that old joke about reserving the A's mostly for God.

Company magazine, a Jesuit publication for friends and supporters, recently highlighted the topic "The Sports World and the Jesuit World" (Spring 2000). Patrick Kelly, S.J., who teaches a course on sports and spirituality at Detroit Mercy University, sharply criticized the systematic nurturing of ego and greed in American athletics: "Most talented players start getting special treatment in junior high school, and by the time they reach the pros, they've had eight

years or more of being coddled." The coddling holds also for the large number who never reach the pros.

It seems, in fact, that even young children playing any kind of sport are being given trophies, wherever they or their team may place in the results or final ranking. In the same issue of *Company*, James Di Giacomo, S.J., an oldtimer in the field of religious education as well as that of spectator sports, comments on "the undesirable effects of adulation" on the young athletes, calling them "accidents waiting to happen."

On the adult scene, we can benefit from the frank reflections of Father Donald Cozzens in *The Changing Face of the Priesthood* (Liturgical Press, 2000). In a section on "The Triumph of the Therapeutic," he examines the problematic side of the contemporary esteem for psychology. He discusses intimacy, which, he says, "follows when one trusts that it will come once it is not directly pursued," and makes the point that "intimacy is primarily gift."

In the therapeutic world of psychology, what is good for the personality and soul of an individual becomes an entitlement one is free to pursue directly and with all the energy one can muster. In fact, . . . one has a responsibility to pursue it, and so we see countless people declare that they will settle for nothing less than the good life.

It seems that our therapeutic culture has not yet discovered the paradox of the Gospel: some things are achieved only when they are surrendered. Happiness follows the forgetting of one's desire to be happy and living in such a way as to foster the happiness of others. Holiness follows the desire to live in harmony with God's will in selfless praise and thanksgiving. It is best pursued indirectly.

Having said all the above—that is, having admitted the narcissism of our times, which we bemoan and from which we all need healing, young and old alike—it seems that we have to reverse our field and even proclaim with some satisfaction that we are God's spoiled children, God's *consentidos*.

We can put it negatively as follows: God patiently lets much of our behavior pass, applying the countermeasures slowly and over the long haul to turn our course gradually about. God does this with our good always at heart. We can, for our part, every so often repeat that old bit of religious wisdom: Lord, if you would judge us strictly, who could endure it?

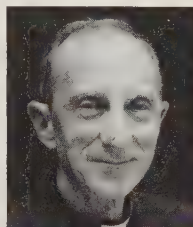
To put the matter positively, God indeed spoils us with the cornucopia of gifts heaped upon us. Right in character, we take so much of this for granted. As we mature, however, our thanks and admiration should go streaming back to the divine fount. Some of God's most beneficial treatment of us has to be honestly described in the contemporary language of tough love.

Even amid our most prayerful striving, the Lord often allows what Saint Ignatius called “desolation”—God’s seeming absence:

Desolation is meant to give us a true recognition and understanding, so that we may perceive interiorly that we cannot by ourselves bring on or retain great devotion, intense love, tears, or any other spiritual consolation, but that all these are a gift and grace from God our Lord and [are meant], further, to prevent us from building our nest in a house which belongs to Another, by puffing up our minds with pride or vainglory. (*Spiritual Exercises*, trans. by George Ganss, S.J.)

May it not also be said that those of us who are truly spoiled—that is, enjoying an abundance of the world’s limited resources and favored almost embarrassingly in other ways—should welcome the situations and moments that promote others over ourselves, or even the moments that put us, with embarrassment, in our place?

My mother, who admitted to being born with the proverbial silver spoon in her mouth, always insisted to my brother and me, “Put yourself out for other people.” She would remind us that in her large family, on the occasion of some childhood triumph that would seem to allow for gloating, the individual was told, “All right, that’s fine; now go sweep the back stairs.” Our parents were as happy as any to see their children playing, or know they were competing, but they did not have to be in the stands making a hullabaloo. That does seem like another day and age, doesn’t it?



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The Abusive Personality in Ministry

Len Sperry, M.D., Ph.D.

If there was one thing Father Jeff Nielon was known for in the three years he had been pastor at his East Coast suburban parish, it was his sudden, angry outbursts. It seemed that any time a member of the pastoral team questioned his judgment or the parish council brought up a pointed issue, he would explode and storm out of the room. The aftermath was just as predicable. Everyone would quietly tiptoe around for several days, making special efforts to please and appease him. Sometimes the staff, which was primarily female, would send flowers. But one thing they didn't do was address the offending subject again, at least in his presence. That meant that many ministry projects were effectively killed. Typically, Father Nielon would return in an hour or so, sometimes being apologetic in a roundabout way, at other times passing out small gifts or letting the staff go home early. The only two males on the pastoral team were decidedly unassertive and never directly voiced objections or concerns to the pastor. Alcohol use was suspected as one of the factors in Father Nielon's volatile outbursts, which were not new behaviors for him. The staff learned that he had acted in a similar fashion in his previous ministry assignment, and that he had apparently engendered considerable jealousy among the staff by playing favorites.

In the recent dramatic film *Apostle*, Robert Duvall plays a Pentecostal-Holiness preacher who is told by

his wife that she wants a divorce. An hour later he is informed, by the elders of the Texas megachurch that he founded, that he is being terminated as pastor. In a contrite manner, the preacher admits to his wife, who is the church's music minister, that he is a womanizer but insists that she not leave him. He becomes increasingly disturbed by the thought of her and their two children taking up with the church's youth minister. He pleads that she give him another chance, but she will not. As the story proceeds, we learn that the preacher's father was an alcoholic riverboat gambler who deserted the family, and we observe his ambivalent attachment to his mother. Throughout much of the story, Duvall portrays his character as a fast-and smooth-talking preacher who charms others while stretching the boundaries of his pastoral authority to get what he wants. When he cannot have his way, he becomes calculating, menacing, and violent. With premeditation, he drinks alcohol and then kills the youth minister with a baseball bat in front of his estranged wife and kids.

Father Richard Ellenberger had recently been assigned as pastor to a group of three rural parishes where a laywoman had been the administrator for nearly two years. She was competent and well regarded by both the pastoral staff and the parishioners. The pastorate had been open for nearly three

years, so there was considerable relief and hopefulness among parishioners when the announcement was made that the pastor would serve the sacramental needs while the administrator would continue to focus on daily operations and finances. The pastoral team had taken pride in the fact that they had worked collaborately and effectively together for nearly two years in the face of serious financial constraints and sagging morale, since the former pastor had been removed because of alcohol problems. Although the pastor seemed somewhat aloof and difficult to approach, the staff and most parishioners made nothing of it. But they did notice that he regularly parked in the handicapped space nearest the main pastoral office. They also noted that at meetings where food was served, he left his dishes for others to clean up. He also didn't seem to be very good about returning phone calls or making hospital visits. But no one complained—at least not initially. During staff meetings and in personal conversations, Father Ellenberger seemed ill at ease and noncommunicative, in stark contrast to the confident and exuberant style of the administrator. He quickly got the reputation of being eccentric and “following his own drummer.” The lay administrator, however, was concerned that pastoral needs were not getting met and attempted to schedule a conference with him. At first he made excuses why they couldn't meet. Later he wrote her a brief note telling her she was “a demanding bitch and better back off.” Within his second month as pastor, he terminated the administrator without any reason and without due process. Needless to say, she felt stunned, hurt, and devastated.

THE COMMON THEME

All three of the ministers described exhibit the kind of behavior associated with the abusive personality, which is characterized by a predictable pattern of abusive behaviors. “Abusiveness,” as I use the term in this paper, does not refer to a single or even occasional instances of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. It refers to an ongoing pattern of abusive behaviors that characterizes such individuals' functioning in given circumstances. These individuals are not abusive at all times and in all situations. Many individuals with this personality can appear to function relatively normally much of the time. However, specific circumstances can and do activate the personality pattern of abusiveness. Research indicates that the abusive personality is the outgrowth of a particular personality structure and differentiates three variants of this structure. This article describes the abusive personality structure, its origins, and its manifestations. It may help you to better recognize this

personality and adopt some strategies for effectively dealing with it in ministry settings.

ABUSIVE BEHAVIORS

Several types of abuse can be described: emotional abuse (shaming, withdrawing, withholding approval, brandishing a weapon, making menacing gestures, giving the “cold shoulder” treatment); verbal abuse (threatening, teasing, harassing, making humiliating or derogatory comments); physical abuse (destroying property or pets, hitting, scratching, spitting); and sexual abuse (unwanted touching, fondling, or penetration). There appears to be a single, unifying dynamic among these types of abuse: dominance or power of subjugation. While there may be different manifestations of abuse, they all have one goal or purpose: to achieve control over the way others think and feel. In short, abusers are overly preoccupied with control. Furthermore, recent research suggests that emotional abuse is common to all other forms of abuse, and that emotional abuse can serve as a proxy for physical and sexual abuse. For instance, an emotionally abusive gesture or comment may remind a battered spouse or a sexually abused child that they can be beaten or molested at any time. Emotionally abusive behaviors can be destructive and intimidating in and of themselves, but they can be even more devastating when accompanied by physical intimidation and sexual intrusion. Because of space limitations, this article will focus on the manifestations of emotional and physical abuse and will forgo discussion of sexual abuse. The interested reader is referred to “The Sexually Abusing Minister” (Sperry, *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT*, Winter 1999) for a description of the personality dynamics of sexual abuse in ministry personnel.

HOW AND WHY ABUSE DEVELOPS

The abusive personality has been the subject of considerable research over the past two decades. Among others, Donald Dutton, Ph.D., has conducted clinical research to establish a psychological profile of men who are emotionally and physically abusive in heterosexual and gay relationships. It appears that these research findings are translatable to ministry personnel. In his book, *The Abusive Personality*, Dutton describes three common developmental factors in abusive males. The first factor is the experience of insecure emotional attachment with their mother or early caretaker. Their attachment was typically one of unpredictable emotional availability, leading to feelings of abandonment and, later, a demanding and angry approach to adult relationships. The second

factor is the experience of being shamed by a parent, usually the father or a father figure. Being shamed by the father is associated with an abiding sense of worthlessness and identity diffusion. The third factor is the experience of witnessing an adult, usually a parent, engaging in abusive behaviors. The child may or may not have been the victim of abuse, but abuse must have been witnessed. No one factor is sufficient to form the abusive personality; all three must be present simultaneously. They create a potential for abusiveness that is shaped and refined by later experiences. Furthermore, variations in these three factors influence the nature and severity of the abuse perpetrated. For example, adult males who were severely physically abused as children and develop abusive personalities are highly likely to physically abuse others as adults. Similarly, those who were severely sexually abused as children are more likely to sexually abuse others than those with abusive personalities who were not sexually abused. Nevertheless, emotional abusiveness is common to all who have developed abusive personalities.

RECOGNIZING THE ABUSIVE PERSONALITY

As noted earlier, people with abusive personalities are preoccupied with controlling the way others think and feel. Control can be thought of as spanning a continuum, from healthy to harmful. On the healthy end, control takes the form of positively influencing and developing another's potential. Individuals exposed to this form of control typically feel encouraged, challenged, or excited. On the harmful end of the continuum, control takes the form of restraining or discouraging another's potential. Individuals exposed to this form of control experience negative feelings, ranging from annoyance to betrayal. The feeling of annoyance is a response to another's efforts to get and control your attention. On the other hand, feelings of anger, fearfulness, hurt, and betrayal are responses to another's efforts to abusively control the way you think and feel about yourself. Thus, a useful way of recognizing the abusive personality is by monitoring how you feel when you are around the person in question and identifying situations in which relations with that individual are difficult. In such situations, experiencing feelings of anger, fearfulness, hurt, or betrayal probably indicates the presence of an abusive personality. Three variants of the abusive personality can be described.

The Cyclical Type. These individuals are easily recognized by their cycling between explosive abusiveness and contrite behavior. Of the three types of abusive personalities, these individuals are the most

troubled and troubling to work with in ministry settings. They may be quite intelligent or otherwise gifted but are difficult to get along with interpersonally. They are problematic to work with or for because of their tendency to easily feel threatened, irritable, jealous, and fearful and to mask these affects with anger and direct or indirect demands for control. They also tend to set very high expectations for others, which inevitably ensures that things will go wrong. In addition, they may experience high levels of chronic trauma symptoms, including outbursts, restricted affect, depression, anxiety, dependency, and the inability to calm and center themselves when they are troubled. As a result, they have a tendency to ruminate and then to blame and project their inner turmoil and shortcomings on others. Typically, this erupts into explosive, verbally or physically abusive behavior. The individual's use of alcohol or other drugs can fuel such eruptions. Many of these individuals meet criteria for the diagnosis of borderline personality disorder. The case example of Father Nielon illustrates the cyclical type.

The Psychopathic Type. Characteristic of this type is the tendency to use abusive control to achieve any and all ends. Although these individuals have the capacity to quickly size up individuals and situations, they have considerable difficulty empathizing with others. They can be cold and calculating, and direct their abusive behavior with precision: with a slight smile on their face, they will whisper a threat or make a derogatory comment, then move on as if nothing had happened. They are masters of denial and deceit, but will "confess" when they are cornered or if it seems advantageous. Emotional abusiveness is easy and effortless for these ministers. Alcohol use is common in the psychopathic type. Of the three abusive personality types, they are the most likely to utilize physically abusive behaviors, and also the most likely to have been severely physically abused as a child. These individuals often meet criteria for the diagnosis of antisocial personality disorder, also referred to as the psychopathic personality. The case example of Robert Duvall's character in the movie *Apostle* is an accurate portrayal of this type.

The Overcontrolled Type. These individuals are overcontrolled in the sense that while they harbor chronic resentment, they control its expression under the guise of either appearing stoic and serious or constantly and superficially cheerful. They wish to be unnoticed and unbothered by the needs and demands of others, but at the same time they want

to be around others. Thus, they attempt to please others and to avoid conflict, but they also avoid feelings and are emotionally distant from others. Sometimes they appear to be eccentric. Nevertheless, they are easily irritated and threatened by others. When they act out abusively, others who do not know them well may be surprised. Emotional abuse is their favored strategy: withholding approval, giving the “cold shoulder,” missing important deadlines, acting totally unexpectedly, or giving false hope. Alcohol or other drug involvement exacerbates this abuse pattern. Often these individuals meet criteria for the diagnosis of avoidant, dependent, or passive-aggressive personality disorder. The case example of Father Ellenberger illustrates the overcontrolled type.

DEALING WITH ABUSE IN MINISTRY

Abusive ministers can be incredibly hurtful and demoralizing to those who work with them, and ministries invariably suffer also. There is a tendency for religious leaders to assume that psychotherapy or a psychiatric referral is the answer to the problem of abusive behavior. Unfortunately, while such referral may sometimes help, it is only one of three basic sets of decisions that religious leaders need to consider. These three decisions sets can be thought of in terms of a three-point decisional model involving decisions about the abusive minister, the religious organization's culture, and the specific ministry situation.

Decision Point 1: The Abusive Minister. The first decision point involves dealing directly with the abusive minister. Individuals with the abusive personality are deeply wounded because of their early experience of abuse, shame, and insecure attachment. It is unrealistic to expect that personal effort, spiritual direction, medication to control aggressivity, or involvement in a general form of psychotherapy will easily modify and heal their deep wounds. The research of Dutton and others suggests that most individual and group psychotherapy is ineffective with abusive personalities, particularly the psychopathic type. On the other hand, a referral to a psychotherapist with a proven track record in treating borderline personality disorder may reduce abusive behavior in the cyclical type, and therapy with the overcontrolled type has a better prognosis. Whether therapy is indicated or not, there is no question that alcohol and other drugs tend to exacerbate abusiveness. Accordingly, a key consideration at this decision point is to secure the commitment of the abusive minister to become substance-free, which may require detoxification

and substance abuse counseling or participation in a support group.

Decision Point 2: The Culture of the Religious Organization. Every religious congregation and diocese has a unique corporate culture—that is, the constellation of beliefs, assumptions, stories, procedures, and customs that characterize an organization. Corporate cultures can be healthy or unhealthy, abuse-prone or abuse-free. Religious institutions and clerical culture have been described as control- and power-oriented. It should not be too surprising, then, that abusive behavior is not uncommon in religious organizations. Furthermore, religious organizations that have abuse-prone cultures are more likely to attract, reinforce, and retain abusive individuals than are religious organizations with more abuse-free cultures. There are two strategies of effectively changing a religious organization's culture to be less abuse-prone: (1) establish admission and screening policies to exclude abuse-prone candidates, and (2) modify the organization's strategy and structure to foster an abuse-free environment.

Candidate Selection: The selection process of candidates for ministry is perhaps the most important decision point for dealing with abusive behavior and the abusive personality in ministry personnel. Perhaps the most critical question a screening committee must answer is, Will we knowingly accept and encourage abusive individuals to enter professional ministries? If the answer is no, the committee will then make the requisite decisions to structure its screening and assessment process to rule out abusive candidates through the use of psychological assessment protocols sensitized to the abusive personality and to histories indicative of habitual abusive behavior. As a general rule, candidates who meet criteria for severe personality disorders are a mismatch for active ministries, given that abusive behavior is characteristic of most severe and even moderate personality pathology, particularly borderline personality disorder and antisocial or psychopathic personality disorder.

Managing Organizational Structure and Strategy: After determining that its culture is abuse-prone, a religious organization can focus change efforts on its strategy and structure. First, its basic strategy (i.e., its vision and mission statement) and its structures (i.e., communication and reporting patterns, policies, and procedures—including screening and admission policy and system of rewards and sanctions) are reviewed to determine how they may en-

gender, support, and reinforce abuse-proneness. Structures that reduce and negatively sanction abusive behavior can then be instituted. Limit-setting is one such structure and is essential in containing abusive behavior in religious organizations. Since abusive personalities have a tendency to disregard rules and social conventions and to breach boundaries, the religious organization must consistently expect that rules will be followed and then set limits that are clear, realistic, consistent, and enforceable. The organization must then promptly enforce these provisions. For example, if an abusive minister has been known to emotionally, verbally, or physically assault parishioners or staff, a firm limit to reestablish basic respect is needed. The decision to review the organization's policies and practices about rewards and sanctions may show that the organization unwittingly reinforces abusive behavior by fostering and rewarding competition (e.g., academic, social, athletic awards and honors), making invidious comparisons, or being inconsistent in sanctioning abusive behavior.

Decision Point 3: Situational Factors. At least two factors can be considered at this decision point. The first involves the ministry assignment of the abusive minister; the second involves an appraisal or monitoring of the abusive minister in that assignment. Decisions about the minister's current assignment need to be carefully evaluated. Whether the individual remains or is reassigned should be a function of the type and severity of abusiveness, as well as the needs of other ministry personnel and those being ministered to at that site. In some instances, the abusiveness is directed primarily toward one or two individuals; in other instances, several people are the recipients of the abuse. Sometimes, when the potential for scandal is very high, or morale is very low, or the situation has reached an impasse, it may be necessary to reassign the abusive individual to a nonactive ministry position or status. When,

however, structural changes can be put into place or the prognosis of psychotherapeutic intervention is fair to good, it may be possible to maintain the assignment.

An important structural component that can positively influence abusive behavior is a quarterly or semiannual performance-appraisal or monitoring system (e.g., some dioceses mandate weekly or monthly monitoring of troublesome ministers). Whatever form it takes, some appraisal method can be implemented with the abusive minister and may allow that individual to remain in a particular assignment. The appraisal can focus on reducing abusive behavior, with specific performance goals set and assessed. Such assessment allows for corrective actions based on formal, documented criteria.

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The Celebration of Ordinary Times

Marie Beha, O.S.C., Ph.D.

In the ordinary times of our lives, each twenty-four hours holds its own series of peaks and valleys. We “rise in joy,” “fall asleep in peace,” and wrestle with the noonday devil in between. But in the spread of seasons and cycle of events, the landscape often levels out till memory’s retrospective can hardly distinguish one day from another. Yet in all that ordinariness, certain times, places, people, and situations eventually stand out. They distinguish the decisive days of our growth, the changes of season in our lives, the occasions when the future takes on new shape and form.

What really changes in these formative moments of our lives is not the landscape but ourselves. Because we are different, everything else—even the old and the familiar—becomes new. Sometimes the challenge of such seasonal change is exciting; at other times, it is threatening. Rarely can we anticipate the shift. Most often, all we can do is scramble to keep up. What we can never do is go back, even though we might wish to. Because these are life changes, they are not reversible.

But they are memorable. We can and do recall the specially significant moments in our lives, assessing their relative importance and mining their meaning more deeply. As we do so, our identity and the direction of our living become clearer. We know better

where we may be going just because we reexperience not only where we have come from but also how we have gotten to where we are.

I invite you to take some time to sit with your life in your hands, holding it lightly as one holds something precious, allowing bits and pieces of the past to rise at will, without attempting to monitor what comes or to organize it into a chronology. I suggest you wait in quiet patience, allowing the past to make itself present as it wills. Ask yourself: What events have shaped my life? What have been the significant moments, when I have found myself changed, a new person, seeing everything differently? In the clearer vision that comes with history’s perspective, we recognize that these times are occasions of grace, and we give thanks for what has been while opening ourselves to what is yet to be.

A pattern of ordinary days punctuated by breakthrough events, life-cycle changes, and climaxes of celebrating or grieving not only structures our own lives but also formed the saints into holiness. Their growth too occurred over time. They lived day by ordinary day, just as we do. Only in retrospect did they, like us, discover the true importance, the real meaning of the events, people, and situations that marked the passage of their days; then they could celebrate them with appropriate thanksgiving.

Let me illustrate this process by describing the life of Clare of Assisi. I have chosen her out of an admitted partiality to someone dear to me, but also because her story, less well known than that of her peer and cofounder, Francis of Assisi, offers fresh perspective on just how the breakthrough moments of our lives form and shape us into that unique expression of divine holiness that each of us is called to be.

SEEDBED OF SPIRIT

Each person's history begins with the momentous event of being born. Though we lack conscious memory of its details, we live all our days out of the "givens" of this beginning. The time, place, and circumstances of our birth form the backdrop for all that will follow. True for us; true also for someone like Clare.

For her the date was 1193. As a century moved toward its conclusion, a new world was coming into being. The stratified society of nobles and peasants was breaking open to allow for the emergence of a middle class of merchants. What the merchants lacked in prestige, they made up in wealth. They were literally the new rich—wealthy not in land but in commerce. Unlike Francis, who was of this merchant class, Clare was born into the nobility. Her background was one of privilege: her family had status in Assisi, lived in a castle, counted as immediate relatives seven knights in armor.

Clare was the first-born daughter, a family position that offered some unique opportunities and responsibilities. Being first ensures one of a special place, including being cherished, even if briefly, as an only daughter. When other siblings come, the first child remains responsible in some way for all the others who come after, "setting a good example," "taking care of the baby"—phrases that suggest an abbreviated childhood, substituted by a kind of forced maturation. Being oldest involves other risks, including inexperienced parents and jealous siblings. All of these Clare knew; they were some of the early experiences that prepared her for leadership and responsibility in the San Damiano community, as well as continued care of the two blood sisters who joined her there.

Even more formative of the future saint were her parents. As for her father, his seems to have been a missing influence; none of the existing records mention him. Undoubtedly, the absence of a father figure left a hole in Clare's life; perhaps her response to Francis as "most holy father" was a certain compensation.

In contrast, her mother was a strong presence. Ortulana was a woman of faith, willing to take risks; witness her undertaking several pilgrimages, includ-

ing a trip to the Holy Land. This intrepid woman was also capable of influencing others in her immediate environment. In her castle home she gathered a group of women who lived together as penitents, devoted to a life of prayer and service to the poor. Clare became part of this group, and it surely prepared her to respond to Francis's call to live a gospel form of life. Like her mother, whose name means "gardener," Clare would foster the growth of others.

So we sit with the stories of our own birth, asking questions like: What was going on in the culture of that period and how has it made a difference in our life? Who were our parents, and what were they like, these most influential persons in our very early life? Were we the first or last child, or did we have to jostle for position in between? How did we relate to our siblings, to our parents, and they to us? What stories about our birth and first years got passed on in family legend? What is our own earliest memory, perhaps vague but still personal?

Many of these are the givens of our existence. We did not choose them, but we can determine how we will respond to them in our present freedom. Givens can end up as either gifts or curses. They are always the raw material of our being formed into Christ Jesus.

INNOCENCE INTERRUPTED

When Clare was about five years old, the security of her childhood came to an abrupt end. Assisi was torn apart by civil strife, and Clare's family was on the losing side. It was a war between the nobility and the new middle class, between those who supported the emperor and those who allied themselves with the papacy. Life was not only uncertain but also dangerous. Women and children had to be evacuated, and Clare found herself an exile in Perugia. The family had relatives there, but that did not ensure an unqualified welcome. Assisi and Perugia had a long-simmering feud that left everyone wary. The proud Offreduccio family, to which Clare belonged, would have had to beg for acceptance.

Still, this experience of exile was a seedbed for future blessings. Some of the first people to enter Clare's "Poor Ladies" were friends from this period of Perugian exile. Benvenute and Fillipa came to know Clare, experienced her leadership in childhood, and were willing to follow her later on.

After some five years of sporadic fighting, peace was finally restored, and Clare and her family could return to Assisi. But it was not the city they had left. The old order was gone, and something new was emerging. Assisi was now a commune, and political power had passed into the hands of the merchant

class. As biographer Ingrid Peterson writes, summarizing this period in Clare's life, "She lost innocence but learned survival."

Perhaps our own childhood included experiences of early hardship that demanded a maturation beyond our years. Death and separation, sickness in the family, or our own illness are just a few of the possible crises that may have interrupted the innocence of our childhood. Or perhaps the climate of our surroundings changed so radically that we could not help but be caught up in the backwash of a larger tragedy. War—whether declared or undeclared, whether a matter of armed violence or unspoken but real prejudice—introduces an element of life's harsher realities. Do we recall any such events? How did we, and how do we, respond to them? Suffering is always a two-edged sword; it can either challenge us to grow or inflict a chronic wound. Even the way we remember these events can determine whether we count them as blessings, at least in retrospect, or still grieve over them as losses. What is almost certain is that we, like Clare, came out of childhood with some loss of innocence. What we have learned from these situations is the ongoing question.

LIFE PATTERNS EVOLVE

The child who left Assisi returned to her ancestral home on the verge of womanhood—at least by the standards of a period in which adolescence was an unknown luxury, as high infant mortality rates and abbreviated life spans served to catapult boys and girls into adult responsibilities while still in their early teens. In the years that followed the family's return from exile, Ortulana would have been preparing Clare for a future as wife and mother, someone who could administer an estate and care for others. In addition, she formed her daughter, as already mentioned, according to the lifestyle of a penitent. Prayer, care for the poor, and a regularity of life events were realities that Clare first experienced in her own home. Formation for a future yet unknown had already begun.

Beyond the preparation expected of a young woman of her social standing, even beyond her formation in penitent spirituality, young Clare also experienced the "more" of vocational attraction. She began to practice a poverty surpassing the almsgiving expected of a well-off young woman. Clare shared some of the choicest portions of her own food with those who were hungry. She prayed and fasted with such evident devotion that she began to have a reputation for piety among the people of Assisi. Her beauty was equally remarkable, and suitors came seeking marriage with this oldest Offreduccio daugh-

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ter. But Clare was firm in her refusal. She knew her heart was elsewhere—although where it was she could not explain, even to herself.

Around this time, she began to hear stories about Francis Bernadone. Assisi gossip indicated that he had gone away to be a knight but now was back home repairing churches. Clare sent alms to assist his labors. When she heard that he had begun to preach, she went, suitably chaperoned, to hear him. What he said and his very way of being touched something deep inside of her. When he came to the castle to speak with her, she was delighted. Heart spoke to heart. What Clare desired, Francis was already living; she would follow Jesus in the same pattern of gospel life.

It was a bold decision, fraught with risks and uncertainty. One of its difficulties was easily foreseen: the opposition of her family. So it was decided that on Palm Sunday she would leave home secretly in the middle of the night and, accompanied by a faithful companion, make her way down to the Portiuncula, where Francis and his brothers would await her.

It was a night she must have remembered for the rest of her life. Leaving home in secret was only the beginning. The walk down to the Portiuncula was long and dangerous, since it meant going beyond the safety of the city walls and into a wooded area inhabited by the robbers and bandits who made any journey dangerous. But Clare's determination stayed her steps.

Francis and his brothers were waiting to welcome

this first Franciscan woman. Clare's hair was cut; she exchanged her lovely clothes for the same rough tunic the friars wore and professed obedience to Francis. That same long night, Francis took her to the Benedictine monastery of San Paulo. It was the beginning of a story that is still being written.

Each of us has memories of the same kind of life decisions. With the increased vision of hindsight, we remember what seemed at the time to be chance meetings, first attractions, slow changes. Perhaps, like Clare, we initially discerned what was not our call: we were not going to remain in a certain relationship, continue in a particular career choice. We fumbled when someone asked us why; we did not know ourselves. It was a time of uncertain waiting, but slowly a joyful expectation began to bubble up within us. We did not know exactly where we were going, but we were not directionless. We were being led.

Then one day it was clear: the way we had been searching for. Now we could see. As quickly as possible, we moved to follow the call that our hearts had heard. Not without pain, of course, and not without opposition—but neither deterred us long. A certain necessity directed our steps; this is what we had to do, must do. Yet at the same time, we felt so free, so right about what we were doing. We moved ahead “with swift pace, light step, unswerving feet.” It was what Clare herself experienced and described.

UNCERTAIN BEGINNINGS

Getting started is never easy—not for Clare, not for us. Clare's Palm Sunday commitment came at a cost. Predictably, her family was outraged and tried to recover this marriageable daughter, whose attractiveness was considered a family asset. When persuasion proved useless, force was tried. Clare matched her family's determination with her own. The Benedictines at San Paulo had the right of sanctuary, and Clare claimed the protection of the church, showing her shorn hair to prove that she was now vowed to God. The seven knights withdrew, defeated by a single woman.

Clare's stay with the Benedictines was brief, probably only a week. Why? We can only surmise the reasons. Perhaps the Benedictines rightfully feared further interruption of their tranquil life of prayer and labor. Clare's family would be back. Perhaps Clare herself knew that San Paulo was not the place for her; her heart had not yet found its home. At any rate, she soon moved on, this time to one of the small communities of Beguines springing up all over Europe at this time. These were laywomen living a communal life style, dedicated to works of charity

and care of the poor. Some members were single, others married; some intended this as a permanent way of life, others came only for a time. At the Beguine convent of San Angelo, Clare's sister Catherine joined her.

This occasioned another scene. The Offreduccio family were determined not to be defeated a second time. And they were almost successful, since San Angelo offered no right of sanctuary. As Catherine was being dragged away, Clare prayed and, in the phrasing of the psalmist, “God heard the pleas of the helpless.” Suddenly, Catherine became too heavy for the strong men to lift. Once again, the knights left in defeat, and Clare claimed her sister as a companion in this new gospel way of life.

What did such opposition do to Clare's spirits? It certainly didn't deter her; in fact, it seems that it strengthened her resolve. Here was a woman of great inner strength and courage. As *The Legend of Clare* phrases it, “Her spirit did not crumble and her fervor did not diminish.” She would go on, despite the “shame and contempt of the world.”

We have all experienced the tug and pull of contrary forces, though probably not with the dramatic intensity Clare knew. Our families and friends may have reasoned against our vocational plans, citing “common sense”; patent bribery may even have been tried. Distractions were offered and delay strongly suggested. This tension of conflicting desires need not have come completely from outside ourselves. Our own hearts were torn, and we were tempted to temporize.

When issues become life-size, opposition is inevitable. How will we respond? Giving in is the easiest way to deflect difficulty, but it leads to personal defeat. Remaining rooted in the certitude of our call or commitment may multiply immediate trouble, but it leads, if not to external victory, then at least to the kind of inner strength that is almost synonymous with freedom. We learn to trust that help will come, that what is of God will not know ultimate defeat. Hoping beyond any reason to hope opens us to the kind of trust that makes growth in poverty's dependence possible. That is what Clare learned in the difficulties of those beginning days.

She also learned discernment as she moved from one form of religious life to another. As we too try first one thing and then another, we discover that our call is not this, nor that, nor even another thing. The temptation to give up and settle for less is very real. But if we listen to the Spirit, we keep on moving, remaining peaceful enough to learn something even from the situations and circumstances we must leave behind. We have left home and we are not yet at home. Patient perseverance is the only way to get there.

San Damiano: Clare had finally found her place, come home. The road there was one of obedience, as she describes it: "By the will of God and our most blessed father Francis, we went to dwell in the Church of San Damiano." Here Clare would dwell all the remaining forty-two years of her life, stability freeing her spirit to follow more closely in the footprints of Jesus.

Today veneration makes us cherish this tiny monastery as a holy place. The reality that faced Clare in those summer days of 1212 was different. *The Legend of Clare* describes it as "small and isolated"—terms with which we can easily identify, especially if we translate them into "crowded" and "unsafe." Most of us know how cramped quarters can strain our spirits, how sameness can dwarf even more spacious quarters than those offered by San Damiano. And location outside the safety of the city walls would add danger to the insecurity of their way of life. Yet the sources point out that Clare did not hesitate to "cast the anchor of her soul" in this place. It was commitment, hers and that of her sisters, that made it a holy place.

We too must find our place, a home for our soul. It may take courage to sustain early and repeated disappointment, strength to keep on searching. But if we follow the path of obedience, more concerned about being led than about choosing a place of our own, we will find our way. And when we do arrive there, we will recognize it as home, put down roots, and grow. We will form community, entering into those personal relationships that transform house into home. Our companions may not all be of our own choosing, but they will be God's choice, and that is enough for us; our very diversity will express some of the richness that is divine life.

That is what Clare too discovered as companions joined her at San Damiano. Some were old neighbors and family friends, people she had long known or grown up with; others were from the peasant class, people Clare would never have met except perhaps as servants or shopkeepers. All were welcomed as "sisters" and invited into a community united in mind and heart. At least that was the goal of their gospel living, "so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me" (John 17:22).

Only in the forever of heaven will that fullness of union be realized; here it always remains a struggle. Clare knew this, so her Rule—written not from the idealism of her beginnings but from the realism of her last years—not only encourages the sisters to "be always eager to preserve among themselves the unity of mutual love" but also warns them about becoming

Our companions may not all be of our own choosing, but they will be God's choice, and that is enough for us; our very diversity will express some of the richness that is divine life

"angry or disturbed on account of anyone's sin, for anger and disturbance prevent charity in oneself and in others." The Rule also goes into detail about asking pardon and forgiving one another. For Clare, coming to San Damiano was a homecoming, but even more, it was a homemaking.

In the rearview mirror of memory, we too may recall and give thanks for the situations and circumstances that have offered us shelter and home. Such an experience of being at home is one of the surer signs of the Spirit's leading. Our searching gives way to finding; we are where we belong. Now we need to stay there, at least until the Spirit calls us to move on. The temptation will be to let the inevitable difficulties of life together lure us to leave. Hoping to escape the boredom of the everyday routine, to avoid the struggles necessary if interpersonal relationships are to deepen into enduring bonds of true love, we leave too soon, condemning ourselves to go from house to house, seeking shelter. In contrast, homemaking takes time and requires continuous effort but finally bears fruits of charity, joy, and peace—signs of the abiding presence of the Spirit. San Damiano symbolizes homecoming and homemaking.

CROSSROADS OF CRISIS

Homecoming is both an end and a beginning. It ends our searching and begins our going deeper where we are. Centered in this place, we are secure

enough to face with courage the challenges of more life and growth.

Having found a dwelling place, Clare and her first companions began to shape their life together. Though they had responded generously to God's invitation to follow Jesus as Francis did, they could not have known its cost. All they could do was follow each day's revelation of God's light and love.

Together at San Damiano, Clare and her first sisters began to discover the daily details of their heart's desire. They envisioned living together as sisters with no superior among them; that was their intent. Then came Lateran IV, a church council as important in its day as Vatican II has been in ours, initiating canons of reform and renewal—one of which was to threaten the very identity of Clare's community. Hoping to control the confusion of multiplying religious institutes, the council fathers forbade the establishment of any new orders. Francis was not at risk, since he had already received oral approval of his Rule; Clare, however, had no such approbation.

The Poor Ladies of San Damiano would have to fit into the existing scheme of things. To begin with, they would need an abbess, a superior. Though Clare was the natural leader of the little group, she "resisted" office until Francis used his authority and "almost forced her" to accept. In obedience she submitted, assuming the title but redefining the lived reality. Clare's abbess would be "mother" but also remain "sister" and servant, "preserving the common life in everything" and leading more by "her virtues and holy behavior than by her office" (as stated in her Rule). It was a gospel solution to a contemporary crisis.

But there was more. Along with the title of abbess, Clare was also forced to accept the Rule of Benedict. This was even more conflictual, since her vocation was to follow Jesus in gospel poverty, just as Francis was doing. In contrast, Benedict's Rule and the universal custom of that period stipulated that women who entered enclosed communities brought with them a dowry, which was turned over to the community. Individuals became poor, but the monastery became rich over time. The Franciscan ideal was "having nothing," both as an individual and as a community. Too risky, the popes protested, especially for enclosed women. Perhaps the friars could manage, since they were free to provide for their needs by seeking out jobs or by begging. What would enclosed women do? They would be totally dependent on the limited amounts and kinds of work that could be done within the monastery and on the alms that others might bring them. Not secure, not safe, and so not to be approved. Clare and her sisters would have to mitigate their observance.

Clare obeyed, but her obedience included respectful protest. She asked for an exception, asked for the privilege of gospel poverty. It was granted in 1216 and renewed in 1228, but it was still limited to San Damiano and a few other monasteries. Most Poor Ladies were not permitted to practice Franciscan poverty, even when they wished to do so, as did Agnes of Prague and her community. Clare could see only one way out of this crisis, which threatened the very identity of the Poor Sisters. She would articulate the lived experience of the community at San Damiano in the first Rule ever written by a woman, obtaining approval for it as she lay dying. Her obedience ultimately translated both the crisis of leadership and the crisis of poverty into occasions of growth and grace; that is the opportunity that is always offered to us in difficult circumstances.

What have been the crises of our life—those of our past and those still being experienced as present opportunities? Perhaps, as we review our own salvation history, we will discover how some of the painful difficulties of our past have opened the door to new directions, better ways of responding. Without the stumbling block of crisis, we could have continued to walk as we had always done and missed the richness of new opportunities. In present situations we are offered the same choice. How we respond marks the difference between beginning to die or continuing to grow.

GROWING IN RELATIONSHIP

The same choices await us in terms of the interpersonal. While events and situations certainly do form us, personal relationships are far more significant influences. In our childhood, parents and siblings lay the foundation on which we will build the rest of our life. But as our world expands, so do our relationships. Gradually, we come to learn the alchemy of self-giving love, which has the power to transform beyond our imagining.

That was the power of the relationship between Francis and Clare. As Jesus' call was enunciated in the syllables of this man's life, Clare heard her own story moving from the expected response of a noble lady of her time into the startling newness of first Franciscan woman. And that was only the beginning. From the superiority of nobility to egalitarian abbess, from the security of her castle home to the risks of San Damiano, Clare followed Francis in the gospel form of life to which both were called. He named her "lady"; she referred to him as "father," as well as "founder, planter, and helper in the service of Christ."

The relationship they tried to name remained a mystery, as human relations always do. Theirs, how-

ever, as Peterson observes, seems especially “enigmatic.” In the beginning, Francis promised the Poor Sisters that he would “have the same loving care and solicitude for you as I have for them,” his own friars. Despite the generosity of this offer, Francis knew himself well enough to be wary of too much contact with his brothers, with Clare, and her sisters. As always, he lived what he legislated, so much so that some of the brothers accused him of neglect. Clare deserved better, they said. Francis responded with a sermon preached in deeds, sprinkling ashes on his head while reciting the Miserere. However, at another time he invited Clare to the Portiuncula, where their sharing of a meager meal turned into a rich repast of mutual encouragement. *The Legend of Clare* describes how their love of God was manifest in a light so brilliant that the townspeople hurried from Assisi, bent on putting out a fire.

Clare received much from Francis, beginning with the inspiration of her call, the invitation to San Damiano, and support and encouragement in her determination to follow the gospel poverty of “having nothing,” which was at the heart of their common vocation. But Francis also received from her in the mutuality that is true friendship. We know that when Francis was agonizing over an attraction to a purely contemplative life, he sent a brother to ask Clare’s discernment. Her answer came back in strong support of his call to direct ministry.

In the last months of his life, worn out by labor and suffering, Francis went back to San Damiano, where he had first heard the voice of the crucifix calling him to “rebuild [my] church.” In that hallowed place, nursed by Clare and her sisters, he transcended the darkness into which he had been plunged, both in body and in spirit, and composed the Cantic of the Creatures.

After several months, Francis left San Damiano at the command of the minister general, who hoped that still another round of medical treatment might improve his health. It was not to be, however; Francis returned to Assisi and the Portiuncula to die. But even in death, he was mindful of Clare and her sisters. He had promised that they would see him again, and his brothers remembered. They carried the body of Francis back to this place of beginnings, so that Clare and her sisters might say their farewells to their “father” in Christ. The details of that scene can still tear at our hearts these many centuries later.

But Clare and Francis’s relationship did not end there; in another sense, it had only begun. Clare would live some twenty-seven years longer. During

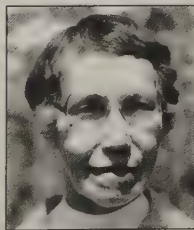
those decades, she not only governed the community at San Damiano but also kept alive Francis’s vision of total poverty. When the friars began to question just what this meant and how it could be lived, Clare and her sisters refuted the arguments of the antipoverty movement with the logic of their lives. The relationship of Francis and Clare remained centered in their shared commitment to “live according to the form of the holy gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Like Francis and Clare, we too are formed by those personal relationships that support and express who we are in God and who God is in us. These are the commitments we make in the free choosing of our adulthood. They may not always be easy friendships, but they change us in significant ways. Despite the surface differences of age, class, and culture, they are always mutual relationships. Each individual gives, and each receives. The relationship endures despite time’s passage and mounting pressures from outside influences. Contact may be limited, but when it does occur there is a meeting of spirits that kindles a spark, and we are renewed in spirit.

These relationships are abiding sources of life within. Even death does not extinguish them. They continue to inspire us personally and become part of what we pass on to others who come after us. Such is the multiplication of mutual love that forms us into who we are.

So who are our friends? What have we received from them? What have we given? To ask the questions is to be renewed in gratitude. It is also to be formed into readiness for the community of saints, in which we will be “no longer servants but friends” (John 15:15).

Early life experiences, especially those in our family, our first experiences of life’s pains, our vocational choices and the beginnings that follow upon them, finding a home and making it our home, surviving crisis times, growing in relationship: these are some of the steppingstones of our lives. They form us, from the beginnings of our life through its wandering paths and detours, giving shape to all our days and all our ways.



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A Spirituality of Trauma

Jo Wardhaugh, F.M.S.A.

Recently, I said to a friend of mine, "Oddly enough, there is something beautiful about working with trauma in my life."

She looked at me in surprise and said, "What on earth could be good about working with violence and trauma?" That made me stop to reflect: Can anything good come from trauma? I have struggled with this question like Job and have had the same failure to reconcile the God of the Old Testament with the God of the New Testament. I have plummeted into a darkness where there seems to be no God, only pain and loss—and, surprisingly, I have found that something beautiful is happening, which as yet I cannot identify.

Trauma is any experience that overwhelms a person's normal coping mechanisms, leaving that person psychologically and spiritually wounded. There are a variety of traumas and traumatic events that one can experience, ranging from serious accidents to natural disasters to violence perpetrated on people by each other. In her book *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman delineates the last two types by saying, "When the force is that of nature, we speak of disasters. When the force is that of other human beings, we speak of atrocities."

LIBERATION OR DESTRUCTION

Trauma is overwhelming, but only atrocities are evil in and of themselves. It is what the victim does with trauma that liberates or destroys. Trauma has taken me on a faith journey and has brought me into a deeper intimacy with myself, others, and God. Before coming into therapy for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), I thought I was healthy, functional, and relational. I did not realize how sick and anemic my spirit was. I had armored myself against life. This kept me away from my soul, spirit, and essence—the very way of being known. In trauma therapy, many of my defenses have cracked, permitting me to begin finding the woman God always intended me to be. The joy of healing is finding this essence within and relating to others through it. Relationships flow with greater ease. An inner wisdom, the inner Sophia, is heard. Because I have seen myself, I am less fearful to be known by others; relationships are thus more intimate and less superficial. As the eyes of my soul slowly heal, my routine prayer life with God becomes a relationship. I now believe the words written in the Song of Songs: "You are wholly beautiful, my love, without blemish."

I once heard that when you have been touched by God, you are never the same. I also know that when you have been touched by trauma, you are never the same. Is the touch of God the same as the touch of trauma? No. Trauma devastates and destroys; God renews and rebuilds. Someone who has been demolished by trauma has the unique opportunity to allow the hand of God to refashion him or her, like living stones being built into a spiritual house (1 Peter 5).

God's touch can, if we allow it, be contradictory. Faith in God has been found to be a primary coping strategy for people who have experienced trauma. My journey has been painful but also beautiful. It has been a journey into darkness and isolation, which led me into the intimacy of being known. ("I call you friends because I have made myself known to you"—John 15.) When you are known at a deeper level, you feel that you understand better some of the mystery of life.

Shame, the first emotion of the Bible, brought with it feelings of being bad. This is the beginning of the journey into isolation and alienation. The healing road away from shame begins with revealing one's all to another (often, a therapist). This is the first steppingstone to freedom. It is a call to be authentic. It is a call to be known.

POWER IN WEAKNESS

In going through PTSD therapy, I have come to know myself and the God within me better. The process of unmasking my hidden trauma has removed the coverings that I had allowed to hide the real me. Standing naked and unashamed before God and myself, I have come to really know, in my being, that I am the beloved of God. I have learned that the way of healing and reconciliation is to travel into the darkness of my own woundedness. It has been a journey into nothingness, pregnant with fullness. It is a journey with Christ to the Garden of Gethsemane, into the hell of the damned and the Resurrection of Easter. It is not yet complete. In this journey, I have heard for the first time a call to live, not just survive—a call to compassion and companionship with others on the journey.

PTSD therapy has been a journey that has shown me the truth of the scriptural concept that your power is in your weakness. When you have been traumatized, you lose your breath and your spirit. The spirit is known as "Ruha," the breath of life, the gift of Christ at his Resurrection. The Spirit brings wisdom, power, life. When someone is traumatized, the breath and the spirit are cut off. Recovery from trauma is also about recovery of the wounded spirit within us. Therapy has helped me to reclaim my

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MISSION OF RECONCILIATION

The mission of the church for the twenty-first century is one of reconciliation. Although I have a long way to go, my therapy has helped me face this mission by first helping me to reconcile myself with myself. Trauma gives one the opportunity to see the mystery of life. In my experience, reality is seen only in darkness. I have walked in the valley of denial, powerlessness, lack of trust, terror, shame, pain, grief, and isolation. The gift received in darkness has been accepting my vulnerability and my limitations and finding the wonders of my humanity. By accepting my humanity, I am discovering that life is about the lifting up from darkness.

Moving into the twenty-first century, missionaries have to look at a new call—a new mission to address the reality of the evil of violence and trauma. People are numbed by violence. People are in pain because of violence. There is so much evil done in violence that it is impossible to comprehend. We try to address it, but first we are called to embrace the martyrdom of our own transformation out of trauma. Then and only then will our eyes be opened to the depths of pain, brokenness, and spiritual death in which trauma binds us. The release of the spirit will come in power when we choose, as individuals and as mis-

sionary groups, to unbind the brokenness of our own lives. In the breaking of the bread of our lives, multitudes can be fed with the richness of a body blessed and broken.

There is a new mission territory: the inward journey. Millions of us today are faced with trauma. We can choose to minimize our collective woundedness, thus missing a lifetime opportunity to release our spirit and find the God of darkness. It is there we are asked to accept the "wedding invitation," to go to the "Passover meal." The call of today is to transform our pain instead of ignoring it.

Trauma leaves both soul and spirit wounded, like plants that have been violently uprooted. The wound left in our soul, like that left in Mother Earth, bleeds out safety, acceptance, love, and affirmation. It remains open, waiting to embrace us as we accept the call to enter into the tomb time, the time of transformation. It is there that new birth will happen.

Missionary groups talk about "new shoots." Usually the image is of a brand new shoot springing up from the ground or from the side of a very old tree. New shoots will spring up from the trauma wound. The earth will transform us: "Unless a grain of wheat will die and fall upon the ground, it remains but a single grain" (John 12:24).

This is a call to live, not just to survive. It is a collective call to enter the Good Friday place—the place of nakedness, of being seen, of complete vulnerability and pain. In the face of trauma, Good Friday is not just one day; it is a place of being. The territory is not mapped out, the roads are not clear, but the invitation is for all of us.

There is a song, written and performed by Peter Gabriel, called "The Blood of Eden." He sings, "In the Blood of Eden/lie the woman and the man/with the man in the woman/and the woman in the man/in the Blood of Eden/lie the woman and the man/we wanted the union/oh the union/of the woman/the woman and the man." Eden was the place of original happiness where there was no shame. Shame is brought about with trauma. It alienates us from ourselves, others, God, and the world. The new Adam is the Christ who came to bring us out of our shame and back into intimacy. Embracing this is a dark journey into faith, believing in the transformation from naivete to wisdom. It is a frightening journey.

In the garden of Gethsemane, Christ was in terror; he sweated blood. Part of his terror was seeing the reality of his future. In his terror, he asked friends to stay with him, but they did not understand; they fell asleep. The way of those with trauma wounds is like that. They are misunderstood and often lonely. The call is to remain in the dark time.

MAKING CONTACT

Robert Grant, author of *The Way of the Wound*, says, "To whom much trauma is given, much is possible." I agree. As one who had been traumatized, I thought I was very good at contact. I worked very hard, had successful ministries, and in driving myself more and more, felt I was making an impact in the church. But I gradually discovered that the gift of trauma is about contacting God through our pain, weakness, and vulnerability, thus making our contact with others life-giving, authentic, and spirit-filled.

JOURNEY THROUGH HEALING

The goal, in the journey through healing, is to regenerate life.

Step 1: Denial. The first step on the road to recovery is to look at denial. The desire to really live has to be stronger than the unconscious desire to just survive. This is a small statement, but if it is not fully embraced, then the healing journey is a theorized journey rather than a lived one.

Step 2: Powerlessness. The body needs to be "thawed" so that blood can flow through the system again. The traumatized individual has been put in a position of severe powerlessness: his or her sense of self has been injured. People who have witnessed horrific atrocities suffer from a sense of hopelessness, despair, and incompetence at not being able to stop such tragedies. Their self-esteem is radically diminished.

A normal reaction to powerlessness is to attempt to regain control. Why? There are many reasons, but I believe a major one is trauma, which shifts some very basic life principles. The shift is from "God is in charge" to "I am in charge; I know God's will, and I will do it." Trauma makes us willful and controlling.

Entering into the pain of powerlessness can start to free the spirit. You see that you have no control over other people or events. You are powerless. Your vision changes with that insight. This brings you back into right relationship with God and others. You take up the proper position in life: "God is the Creator, the all-powerful one, and I am the creature of God. I have no power over anything, but I am not helpless." The person who walks this way has a calling to deep peace instead of the drivenness of acting as a messiah. It is a call to be able to see what is. It is about knowing your limitations, looking stark reality in the eye, making new choices. It is about accepting the world for how it is, not how it should be.

Step 3. Trust and Safety. Farther inside the traumatized individual, there are major issues concerning lack of trust and safety. Trauma destroys one's sense of safety. Unconsciously, traumatized people believe that no one can be trusted. They view others with suspicion. Their capacity for intimacy is compromised, thus weakening their link with their community. This brings further isolation, loneliness, and misunderstanding. Their view of God changes: "How could a loving God allow such a tragedy to happen?" Yet some people whose faith in God was weak before the traumatic event find that their faith in God has increased; they see that God is larger than the event they survived.

The traumatized lose their capacity to trust themselves. They realize that they may have made some bad decisions. They move out of the wisdom of the body and build large protective walls, learning to live in their head, isolating themselves from self and others. How can they be healed? How can they learn again to trust the world?

Stage one in healing is learning to trust yourself. Fear of your own poor judgment must be embraced. People who have been traumatized do not know their own feelings. They have become externally referenced. Reclaiming one's feelings is extremely frightening. Learning to become internally referenced again is like bringing feeling back into the body after frostbite; it is extremely painful. Reclaiming trust in your own feelings means making the painful journey out of isolation and into intimacy with yourself. By doing this you slowly learn to live by the wisdom of the body, reclaiming a whole new relationship with yourself. Having learned to trust yourself, you can then take down some of the protective walls; this allows you to reach out to contact others. Recontacting the core of your own wisdom allows you to be intimate with others.

Step 4: Shame. Shame is the experience of being seen as deficient, bad, and undesirable. It causes an inner sense of being insufficient and diminished as a person. Shame causes blindness: your eyes are the gateway to your soul, and shame takes your soul away and binds it in darkness. Like evil, shame thrives in darkness and despair.

Shame wounds so profoundly. It is the killer of soul and spirit. A shame-bound person finds it deeply painful to look inward. It is easier to look outward, point fingers, and blame. Looking inward feels like sure death. Healing from shame is like embracing the mystery of death and resurrection, darkness and light. The struggle between good and evil is on.

In PTSD therapy, the living truth is what matters. The truth can set you free in mind and body, but the

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spirit looks for the truth of the Resurrection. I believe that shame binds you in a despairing black hell. No theory can release you from this, only the truth of the Resurrection. Only one who has been there and risen to light can pierce the darkness of another's hell. Only the person in hell can see the spirit of freedom and hope, authentically held out, by one who has journeyed that way. It is essential that therapists have walked their own mystery of death and resurrection before working with trauma victims, who are acutely aware of truth. Darkness cannot pierce darkness; only light can do that.

In a letter to Agnes of Prague, Clare of Assisi wrote of the Lord, "Gaze upon Him." You cannot gaze if you are bound in shame. Gazing means taking a long, slow, loving look, not just a quick, detached look. The call is to gaze at the wounds of Christ. He hangs, suspended on the wooden cross, gazing back at my wounds. The call is to gaze through the wounds, to go into the wounds and allow them to be opened up to the gaze of someone who loves you, even if this is painful. It is essential to gaze lovingly upon yourself and be able to say, "I love myself."

Healing from shame is about resurrection. The question to be asked is, "Am I a resurrected person?" Eyes are damaged by shame. In the Book of Tobit, Tobit's eyes are blinded by the hot droppings of sparrows. Doctors could do nothing for him, and for four years he remained blind. Likewise, shame blinds. The story of Tobit's recovery of sight is profound.

Only when the “fish” medicine is put on his eyes can he “look on the light.” He exclaims, “I can see, my son, the light of my eyes.” Once we deal with shame, it does restore our sight, and we are able to see the child within again.

Step 5: Grief. Grief can be defined as intense mental anguish that throws a person into deep sorrow. One suffers in anguish at seeing a stark reality. Grief is one of the most feared emotions. In grief, we appear to lose control. Grief brings us to tears. You can only cry when you see what you have lost. When you are completely numb, you do not know what you have lost. Grief comes when the iceberg of the unconscious begins to thaw and the waters—both salty and refreshing—start to flow and to heal.

You cannot skip grief. Grieving is about who you have become; it is about grieving your lost potential. As the Book of Lamentation says, “There is no sorrow like my sorrow.” Writing to Agnes of Prague, Clare said, “All you who pass by the way, look and see if there is any suffering like my suffering.” In grieving about trauma, that is exactly how you feel as you contemplate the lost relationships, lost potential, lost possibilities. The journey of grieving and sorrow is a journey into acceptance of who you are now and how trauma has affected you. There is a mixture of joy at the wisdom gained and sorrow at the loss of what might have been.

Step 6: Emptiness. There has been so much cleansing and searching and acceptance of the woundedness of life. It has been like a review of your whole life, with all its joys and sorrows. Now there is only emptiness. It is the Cana feast all over again: the old has run out, and it is time to wait for something new to be born. This is another waiting in darkness. Feelings of struggle and pain may disappear, leaving you with a sense of emptiness and lostness. Where does your life go now? Who are you? When you are stuck in trauma, you may have a very strong externalized identity (e.g., as a good worker, a project manager, a missionary). The journey into trauma is a journey of purification and transformation, of waiting for a new inner identity to emerge.

I believe that God calls us to wholeness in life. The world today is drastically traumatized. Some people may look for therapy for PTSD and deal with the fractured mind. Some therapies may deal with the traumatized mind and body. This does not go far enough. Violence traumatizes mind, body, soul, and spirit. Mind and body must first be united in healing, to allow the healed body to be used as an instrument in healing the traumatized soul and spirit.

Stage 7: New Relationship with God. In his article on “Trauma in Missionary Life” (*Missiology*, January 1995), Robert Grant writes the following:

Last but not least, a mission spirituality needs to be developed that is able to find meaning and direction for those constantly faced with violence, oppression, and stark expressions of evil and inhumanity. The martyr motive, which formally allowed men and women to deal with changes in culture as well as violence, is no longer sufficient. Spiritualities grounded in martyrdom only encourage people to internalize trauma and its destructive effects instead of working through the trauma.

I believe that God is at the center of our lives, waiting for each of us to come to him as the “bride.” The bride is not one who is languishing among the flowers; she has the same destiny as the bridegroom. The way of trauma takes us to that place. We are called out of isolation and into intimacy—from being bound in shame to being known as friend. My journey through trauma has been a long one. I never imagined that pain could be so painful. Yet my wound has now turned into a great blessing. I have gained the realization that life is a mixture of good and evil, that life will never be a utopia; it will always be the struggle of the pilgrim way. That realization is the joy of life.



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